The Washington Monthly

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Paul Taylor on a realistic approach to campaign finance reform

WARNING: Privatizing Medicare ~~may~~ will be hazardous to your health

by Kip Sullivan

Also, reviews by:

Christopher Buckley, John Kenneth Galbraith, David Garrow, Jon Meacham, Colman McCarthy, and Morton Mintz

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Double Standard in Congress:

'No One Is ABOVE the Law'

(EXCEPT LAW-BREAKING EMPLOYERS)

The battle-cry of pious Congressional Republicans intent on impeaching the President has been: "No one is above the law." No one? What about unfair employers who routinely break the law when they fire workers who want to form unions? (When the National Labor Relations Board attempts to do its job and protect workers' rights, these same Republicans try to cut the agency's budget!)

Joining a union is the only right that people exercise with fear in their hearts. Each year 10,000 Americans are fired for supporting union organizing, a crime that never makes the 11 o'clock news. Except for strikes and scandals, unions don't exist in today's media.

Do the numbers for yourself: Union workers earn up to one-third more than non-union and are more likely to have pensions and health benefits. Surveys show that four in 10 workers who are not currently in a union would join one if their employer allowed them a free choice.

The fact they can be fired for exercising a right guaranteed by law, is most certainly a crime, but apparently not a newsworthy one — giving "law and order" Republicans a free ride to wink and nod at the law-breakers.

When I started out in construction in Philadelphia in the late 1950's, almost every newspaper in America had a labor reporter. We were an important story.

Today, only a handful of newspapers still have labor beat reporters who understand issues confronting working people. Which helps explain why reporters don't make the connection between the decline of unions and the decline of wages in this country.

The notion that employers benefit from keeping unions out and wages low is not written about, nor their collusion with the "soft on crime" Republicans in Congress.

That could be investigative reporting at its best — that is, if what happens to working people stirred any interest with today's media.

Martin J. Maddaloni,
General President

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Letters

Overtime

I have been General Counsel of The Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) / SEIU for 10 years. CIR is a labor union that represents 10,000 resident physicians around the country, including in Washington D.C. I have just finished reading Robert Worth's wonderfully titled article, "Exhaustion That Kills" (Jan./Feb. 1999).

The issue of excessive hours worked by residents has been in the forefront of CIR's work for many years. We fought to bring the hours regulations into existence in New York state 10 years ago. But we could not afford to rest and enjoy the victory. Immediately afterward we had to oppose the hospitals' efforts to overturn those regulations through the courts. And from then until now we have been in a long struggle to get effective enforcement of the regulations. Most recently we are concerned about new efforts to weaken or remove the regulations.

I am familiar with all the arguments and have read many articles, both scholarly and journalistic, on the subject. I was impressed by Mr. Worth's article. He addressed the excessive work hours comprehensively, yet in a manner that made it accessible to the general public. It was impassioned and precise, a wonderful combination especially suited this issue.

We are grateful to *The Washington Monthly* for putting a much needed spotlight on this important issue and for assigning a writer of Mr. Worth's caliber to the project. We are hopeful that this quality article will obtain some notice by policy makers in Washington, D.C. and move the issue forward there. Mr. Worth's suggestion about the Health Care Financing Administration's possible involvement is an excellent one, one that we will pursue.

HARRY FRANKLIN
General Counsel
Committee of Interns and Residents
New York, N.Y.

Low Blow

I applauded your December "Tilting at Windmills" item deploring the growing incivility and reminding us of the need to avoid being mean and self-righteous about the shortcomings of others. That's why I was sorry to read Martin Berger's letter in the same issue. Mr. Berger took issue with a previous *Monthly* article by Ben Lieberman criticizing the federal low-flow toilet mandate. Like Berger, I own two low flow toilets and I agree with him that Mr. Lieberman's article overstated the case against them. But Mr. Berger then concluded his letter with a cheap shot to the effect that Mr. Lieberman "was unusually full of what toilets are designed to dispose of." Yeah, that was cute, but it was also gratuitously nasty, both of Mr. Berger and of you. As the editor, your choice to print that portion of Mr. Berger's letter did nothing to advance the level of civil discourse. Mostly, of course, I enjoy your magazine; I've subscribed for years.

CHARLES S. BROWN
Arlington, VA

More, Not Less

Charles Peters argues ("Tilting at Windmills," Jan./Feb. 1999) that universities must re-direct their efforts from research to teaching, and that they must find ways to teach their students about a range of new, complex issues ranging from global warming to the global economy to interdisciplinary courses on "the political, economic, and scientific elements of today's problems."

To accomplish this, we must generate the knowledge and understanding of these issues. That means, if anything, more, not less, research. We cannot teach about global warming without understanding it—and I'm not sure we do yet. We cannot teach about the global economy—and I'm not sure we do yet.

It is too easy to suggest that the problems of understanding and knowledge can be solved if only some institution would undertake some specific reform, particularly when that reform, on its face, sounds plausible. But in this case, the consequences would be a reduction in our knowledge and understanding, and, therefore, a diminution in our ability to help our students understand the complexities facing them today and in the future.

DONALD A. COFFIN, DEAN
Division of Business and Economics
University of Northwest Indiana
Gary, IN

Out of Touch

It should give you sufficient pause just to state ("Tilting at Windmills," Jan./Feb. 1999) that the economic establishment has accepted the opinion that full employment and inflation are not mutually destructive. Since when has conformity to an idea in economics ever been the criterion for successful thought?

Two main differences make the current situation different from prior circumstances. First, so much of what we buy is now imported from low-wage countries. (The ever-growing deficit in current account and indebtedness to foreign countries will be a huge and possibly insoluble problem shortly.) Secondly, the power of labor unions has been drastically curtailed and the specter of long strikes and huge wage raises, justified or not, is, at least temporarily, a thing of the past.

Your thoughts are what have moved me from party registration to independent. Both sides (although I must say that liberals, at present, appear to be more so inclined) seem to stick to outmoded theorems without adjusting for changed reality.

PAUL ENGEL
Las Vegas, NV

Judge Not

I've long admired Charlie Peters' common sense and decency, so I was bothered when he attacked Rep. Bob Barr by comparing him to Heinrich Himmler. Why is it that liberals preach tolerance and condemn the politics of personal destruction, then turn around and vilify their political opponents as Nazis and racists? Would it be OK for critics of Peters to say that his physique—and his philoso-

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phy—were "eerily similar" to Josef Stalin's?

STEVE SHIRLEY
Helena, MT

On Target

I've subscribed to *The Washington Monthly* for 15, maybe 20 years and my mind wouldn't be as clear without it. I'd like to be more articulate about that, but as I once told Walter Shapiro, being from Los Angeles I don't feel compelled to be articulate about my inarticulateness. Nonetheless, the mini-essays on "journalistic objectivity" in the Jan./Feb. 1999 issue were eye-opening, refreshing, wonderful and most important, right on target. I'm sick of the focus on who's gaining power and who's losing it: It's like watching the stock market all day long, or worse, the Hollywood power game. I'd love to see you expand on this theme in book length, or at least apply the format to other topics such as the Theater of (Absurd) Impeachment. Keep up the good work.

DAVID RENSIN
Tarzana, CA

I found all of the essays by the various contributors to the Symposium ("Just the Facts," Jan./Feb. 1999) interesting and well done. But you needn't have bothered with any of them with the exception of Art Levine's wonderfully scary scenario—"The President Under Siege: Lucy and the Japan Crisis." That said just about everything that needs to be said about the state of journalism in the so-called new age.

I take issue, however, with one of Walter Shapiro's statements, that "White House reporters are prisoners with golden handcuffs ... forced to take their cues from press handlers and spin masters as they react to the torrent of the often manufactured news emanating from the Oval Office. Granted, there are major stories not being adequately covered in the press, but the focus of most of this real news is outside the capital."

My problem is that the "real" news outside the capital usually connects with something inside the capital. If it's no-news time at the White House, couldn't these people get off their duffs and start covering stuff that is really vital to us out here in the "real news"? If their problem is that they are specifically assigned to the White House, then those with any gumption could be following up on the "real" news in their spare time, instead of attending National Press Club luncheons and parties hosted by the very people they are supposed to be covering.

I am afraid Mr. Shapiro is just making excuses for a journalistic class of elites who have been becoming part of the problem!

MARYELLEN LAKE
Chester, MA

Heir Cut

Now that Bob Livingston has resigned, most of what Alexandra Starr wrote about him ("The Speaker," Dec. 1998) becomes of but transitory importance. For a small few of us, however, it remains of lasting importance that one inaccuracy in her piece not escape correction.

Bob is not in fact descended from the Robert R. Livingston (1746-1813) who helped draft the Declaration of Independence. Rather he traces his lineage to Philip Livingston (1686-1749), the second lord of Livingston manor on the Hudson River. The drafter of the Declaration descended from Philip's younger brother, likewise named Robert (but 1688-1775), of "Clermont." Therefore he belongs to an entirely different branch of our family than does Bob.

Whatever other infidelities Bob may have committed, he would never, I feel sure, claim any but his true forbears. Descent from the second lord is quite good enough.

ROBERT GERALD LIVINGSTON
Chevy Chase, MD

Correction:
Due to an editing error, a line in Michael Millenson's article in our December 1998 issue ("What Doctors Don't Know") appeared to endorse "Canadian-style national health insurance." That is not his view.

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Tilting at Windmills

By Charles Peters

SAT Tutors • Deadbeat Dads • Protecting Pedestrians • Mitch McConnell's Maker's Mark • Why Sally Hemings Upsets Conservatives

One of the more amusing aspects of the Lewinsky affair is the way people on each side call Monica Lewinsky and Linda Tripp liars on some issues yet hail them an inspired tellers of truth on others. If you're Ken Starr or Henry Hyde, you love most of Tripp's testimony, but don't like it when she says Kathleen Willey not only encouraged the president's advances but was delighted when they happened. And with Lewinsky, of course, her testimony that no one asked her to lie is as devastating to Starr's case as her account of the details of physical intimacy is to Bill Clinton's.

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How does Senator Mitch McConnell get free bottles of Maker's Mark, his favorite bourbon, from the Distilled Spirits Council? Aren't there supposed to be rules prohibiting such freebies for our law makers? The explanation, as you've probably guessed, lies in loopholes. An exception is made for products from the legislator's home state. So if you happen to be a senator from Kentucky who likes bourbon whiskey, you're in hog heaven. But you don't have to be from Kentucky. Other loopholes allow the free booze to flow. Senator Don Nickles got his free because it was, reports *The Washington Post*'s Bill McAllister, "for a fund-raiser for his political action committee and therefore acceptable under the rules."

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Last year the Navy fell 7,000 short of its recruiting goal. In just the final quarter of the year, the Army fell 2,300 short of reaching its goal. Maybe it's time to resurrect an old *Monthly* cause—a draft that would restore World War II-like democracy to the military. For most of us who were in the military between 1940, when the democratic draft began, and 1964, when it effectively ended, the service was a place we got to know people of every background. Along with jury duty and the public schools of that era, the military was the common ground where we all met and acquired or reinforced a belief in democracy that was rooted in the reality of personal experience. It was also a chance to serve our country, to repay our debt to society.

Republicans who attack Larry Flynt for offering $1 million for dirt on them fail to mention Richard Mellon Scaife's $2 million investment in dirt on Bill Clinton.

In recent years, a draft has seemed an unlikely goal to pursue because the military has been getting enough recruits without it. Now that it isn't, a draft may have a better chance of being adopted.

So I propose a lottery. (The personnel need is not nearly great enough to require a universal draft.) In order to get the kind of people who have not been volunteering in proportionate numbers we could confine the lottery to 18 year-olds with family income of more than $100,000 or SAT scores above 1400. In recent years, the meritocratic and financial elite have not been notable for their eagerness to serve. They need to be reminded of their duty.

There's no reason why a civilian service option should not be included so that a draftee would have the choice of say 18 months in the military or 24 in AmeriCorps. There should be a longer term for civilian service to recognize the greater rigor of military life.

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Two of the more curious causes to stir the souls of conservatives are the case of the paternity of Sally Hemings' children and the article in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (*JAMA*) about teenagers' view of oral sex. Apparently conservatives dislike William Jefferson Clinton so intensely that they don't want to admit that the other Jefferson may have strayed, and thereby matched or even excused Clinton's behavior. For similar reasons, they don't like having teenagers endorse the president's belief that oral sex is not sex. They have even gone so far get an excellent editor of *JAMA* fired, which demonstrates that they are not only jerks but stupid as well. It would have been smarter to say, "This authoritative study proves just what we have said all along: Bill Clinton is an adolescent at heart."

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GOOD NEWS FOR THE CAMPAIGN to get deadbeat dads to pay for child support. The Department of Health and Human Services reports that collections of delinquent child support from parents have risen 80 percent in the last 6 years. A major factor is a federal program that deducts delinquent child support payments from income tax refunds. Ingenuity is also being displayed at the local level. In Fairfax County, Va., deadbeat parents are finding their cars booted. One District of Columbia liquor store owner, the father of three Fairfax teenagers, was not responding to a caseworker's calls and letters about his delinquency. But when he left his Ford Explorer parked on a Fairfax street, sheriffs deputies but a boot on it. Within days, he paid off the entire $21,000 he owed.

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RECENTLY I READ ABOUT another law enforcement tactic that delights me. For you to understand why, I have to explain that there is a crosswalk near my home that is marked to give pedestrians the right of way. This is almost totally disregarded by drivers who speed by, ignoring people trying to cross. Because I am a bit eccentric, as you probably divined long ago, I sometimes try to assert my rights. The result is that, although I have not been hit yet, I've had some very close calls. Occasionally drivers are courteous. More often they try to swerve around me or speed up to get by, stopping only at the last moment with squealing brakes, often accompanied by a finger extending from the middle of a fist being shaken from the open window. Now you will understand how pleased I was to read in *The Wall Street Journal* about an undercover police program in Beaverton, Oregon. Officers in plain clothes start to walk across the marked walk. Motorists who fail to stop get a surprise. Sirens blare and a hidden police car pulls them over. First they get warnings. Next comes a ticket that sets them back $170. How I would love to hand one to one of those guys with the extended fingers!

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SPEAKING OF SABOTAGE, THE *Washington Monthly*'s long campaign to undermine the insane authority of SAT scores recently secured important support from an article by Tony Schwartz in *The New York Times Magazine*. Schwartz gave examples of students whose SAT scores were increased by as much as 400 points by special tutoring. The catch is that the average cost of the tutoring is $175 for 50 minutes. This is not a one time fee but paid each week over the course of an academic year. When there are double sessions, as is often the case, the cost can easily exceed $10,000. And if the tutor is the current champ, Arun Alagappan, the man responsible for that 400 point jump, the charge is $415 a session and the total comes closer to $25,000. One obvious problem with all this is that most students can't afford tutoring, meaning that they are at a disadvantage competing for admission with those who can. An equally serious question involves the legitimacy of a test whose results can be subjected to this kind of manipulation.

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ANOTHER CAUSE OF OURS ALSO deals with threats to pedestrians. Drivers who talk on cell phones are a danger to themselves and everyone else on the road. "Running late for a hair dresser's appointment in downtown Cincinnati," writes Andrew Conte in the *Cincinnati Post*, "Kathleen Sullivan picked up her cellular phone and started dialing her beauty shop as she drove through rural Butler Country, Ohio, three days before Christmas. Moments later, the 29-year-old drama teacher drove through a stop sign and died when her car hit two school buses at an intersection."

The *Post* article goes on to mention a study reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* "that found drivers using a phone are four times as likely to have an accident."

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IN LIGHT OF ALL THE complaints one hears from travelers to China about how bad the air pollution is in its cities, this report from Joseph Verrengia of the Associated Press is not comforting: "Scientists said Sunday they have documented for the first time that industrial pollution and dust from Asia travels thousands of miles across the Pacific and degrades air quality over the United States."

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THIS IS YET ANOTHER illustration, along with many others, from global warming to capital flight to the dangers of nuclear, chemical and biological terrorism, that points to the great need for more effective means of world governance. I'm convinced this is one of the major challenges of the new millennium. The current mechanisms for dealing with these problems, including the United Nations, are woefully inadequate.

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A BOOK THAT ISN'T GETTING the attention it deserves is Gregg Easterbrook's *Beside Still Waters: Searching for Meaning in an Age of Doubt*. If, like me, you find the omnipotent God of official religion a little hard to swallow, Easterbrook shows that He isn't in the Bible but was the product of traditions that arose long after the scriptures.

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ANOTHER BOOK THAT DIDN'T receive enough attention—at least from us—is Buzz Bissinger's *A Prayer for the City*. When we were deciding the winners of our Book Award for 1997, I was told that it was a 1998 book. It was in fact a 1997 book, and so I apologize to the author and to our readers for

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failing to include it among the winners. It's one of those rare good books about the reality of local government, deserving mention in the same breath with Robert Caro's *The Power Broker*, which *was* a winner of our award.

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SPEAKING OF CITIES, HERE'S A major problem for many of them—not the big ones but the small-and medium-sized. Their economic viability is threatened by the airlines. Profit maximization to the airlines usually means not serving small markets or offering only high-fare commuter service. Frank Swoboda of *The Washington Post* reports that the fare for Denver to nearby Casper, Wyo. is $320. The fare from Denver to Dublin, Ireland, he points out, is only $450. Recently the citizens of Des Moines, Iowa, appealed to United Airlines to cut the fare for the 299-mile trip between the city and Chicago which cost as much as $800. United's chairman, Gerald Greenwald, graciously agreed to lower it to $513. My concern about this problem arises from more than a general concern with the plight of the cities affected. My hometown happens to be one of them. A weekday round trip now costs $700. And that's from Washington, D.C.—249 miles away.

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SPEAKING OF STICKER SHOCK, here's a reverse example. In Great Britain, the people are up in arms because the universities are daring to charge tuition. Want to know what the top figure is? $1,700 per year for a wealthy family to send Jason or Jennifer to Oxford or Cambridge. Room and board is about $2,600 a year for a room with fireplace and afternoon tea. In this country, that wouldn't even pay for the SAT tutor.

The British tuition is so low because the government pays most of the cost. Lower-income students pay less. According to *The Washington Post*'s T.R. Reid, 30 percent of those at the bottom of the economic ladder pay nothing. Isn't that the way it should be here?

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STATES, BY THE WAY, ARE JUST as inadequately covered as cities. That's why the Febuary issue of *Governing* magazine deserves special attention. It contained a detailed rating of the management of each state's government. Missouri, Virginia, Utah, and Washington got As; Alabama got a D.

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RUTH REICHL, the *New York Times* restaurant critic who is soon to become editor of *Gourmet*, will leave a legacy *Newsweek* describes as "her struggle to democratize...she insisted that in America everyone spending $100 on dinner should be treated equally." What if you don't have the $100 to spend on dinner? This reminds me of the time a *Newsweek* editor described the pain of moving from their old offices on Madison Avenue to new quarters; The Four Seasons was no longer just a block away.

The draft should be confined to 18-year-olds with family incomes of more than $100,000 or SAT scores above 1400.

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"THE KINDLY DEBT COLLECTORS" is the headline of a recent story in *The New York Times* describing how Brooklyn Union Gas has hired four certified social workers to help its customers who are having problems paying their bills. So now we know where at least some of the trained social workers are. Where they aren't, according to another *New York Times* article, this one by Jason DeParle in the Dec. 20 Sunday magazine, is helping people on welfare make the transition to the world of work.

What appears to have happened is that during the two decades or so that welfare was almost automatically given to anyone who applied for it, skilled social workers lost interest in working with recipients. The job had become clerical. And so it began to be filled by people whose talents were, to put it gently, limited. In addition, DeParle says, having gotten jobs themselves they have little patience with welfare recipients. All this is important because now is the time when welfare needs the skills of good social workers. Reform has reduced the rolls by roughly half. But those that remain are usually difficult cases with multiple problems—long commuting time to jobs, inadequate help with child care, and lack of marketable skills. They need wise advisers to guide them through all the obstacles to success in the world of work.

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SINCE WE HAVE OVER the years been severe critics of safety practices of the airline industry and the FAA, we should give both credit for a good year in 1998. Six hundred fifteen million passenger miles were flown by U.S. airlines. Not a single passenger lost his life.

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HERE'S ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF A misleading headline, and, incredibly enough, like the one in the most recent "Tilting," it's over a story by Linda Greenhouse in *The New York Times*. The head reads: "Debate on Indictment: Constitution Does Not Favor or Forbid Charges Against President, Experts Say." Yet in the fourth paragraph of the article we find this sentence: "Most legal scholars and historians believe that the President, alone among all the 'civil officers' subject to impeachment, cannot be prosecuted until he is no longer in office."

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PERHAPS THE MOST AMAZING aspect of the whole impeachment mess came when the House managers made a big deal about the need for witnesses in the Senate. They could have called all the witnesses they wanted during the House Judiciary Committee hearing. All of the managers were and are members of that committee. Not only could they have called any witnesses they wanted, they could have asked any questions they wanted. How many witnesses did they call and how many questions did they ask back then? The answer to both questions is none.

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U.S. INFORMATION AGENCY cultural officers will not be used as cover for the CIA when USIA is absorbed into the State Department, according to a senior department official. One wonders why a similar policy was not followed with Unscom. Its inspectors were doing crucial work in Iraq. Why would we sabotage their credibility by using them as spies?

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IF YOU SOMETIMES SUSPECT that the daily trading of hundreds of millions on the stock exchange is not solely motivated by the pursuit of sound investment, consider what is called the "day trader": "[H]e doesn't care much about the fundamentals of companies, like how much money they're likely to make," writes David Ignatius, *The Washington Post*'s new op-ed columnist. "That's old fashioned. Instead, he looks at volume. If lots of people are rushing to buy a stock, he reckons, it's likely to be higher still in an hour—and that's all the time a day trader needs to jump in and out at a profit."

One wonders what's going to happen to these fellows on a day when the market suddenly heads south—not gently, but as it did in October 1987—plummeting too rapidly for sell orders to be executed as they are received on the exchange floor. You say sell but the market is down ten points before your stock is actually sold, leaving you not a big winner but a bankrupt loser.

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REPUBLICANS WHO ATTACK Larry Flynt for offering $1 million for dirt on them fail to mention Richard Mellon Scaife's $2 million investment for dirt on Bill Clinton. After all, it was that investment that set off the round of political sex scandal that culminated in Flynt's proposal.

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BEFORE HIS DEATH IN NOVEMBER, the great political consultant Matt Reese had begun working on an article for this magazine about how to reform the present campaign system. "Begin public financing of all campaigns. Require TV and radio stations to contribute time, like they do in other countries. Make the penalties stiff, not FEC games, for violation" of campaign finance laws. Matt also exposed one of the rackets of the campaign consulting business: The consultant who urges his candidate to buy more and more TV time so the consultant gets richer and richer from the commissions he gets on each ad. Paul Taylor's article in this issue offers confirmation of this practice.

Matt and I met in February of 1960 when he came to my office in the West Virginia legislature where I was working on the staff. He was deputy director of John Kennedy's West Virginia campaign and asked me to run it in Kanawha county. I soon agreed and, through the desperate heat of that campaign in which we managed to turn a 20 percent deficit in the polls to a 16 percent victory, we forged a friendship that endured until his death. Matt believed in John Kennedy as he later did in Robert Kennedy. But not long ago he told me that one of the great regrets of his life was that he had found so few other candidates that he felt the same way about. Not enough good people were running for political office, which is why as his life came to a close, Matt was trying to reform politics so that better candidates would come forth. My own view is somewhat tougher on the good people. To me they have a duty to participate no matter how mean and nasty politics can be. If they don't start participating in much greater numbers, it's doomed to stay mean and nasty.

I hope veteran readers will forgive me for retelling my favorite story about Matt. The scene was Robert Kennedy's home, Hickory Hill, on the Friday after the 1960 Wisconsin primary which had suggested JFK was weak among Protestant voters and thus, because West Virginia was 95 percent Protestant, transformed the May primary in West Virginia from the minor leagues into a major political event. Five of us had been flown up from West Virginia to advise the Kennedy brain trust on what to do next. The answer wasn't easy because this was when we were behind 20 percent in the polls. When my turn came, I said we had to identify the campaign with FDR, trying to explain that West Virginia regarded him as God. My argument was too abstract. Bobby looked bored. Then Matt bailed me out.

"I was in Logan [a small town in southern West Virginia] last week, walking along the main street with a fellow I know. Suddenly he stopped and said, 'Do you know Eleanor Roosevelt stood right here where we're standing now?' I said, 'No I hadn't heard she was here recently.' He replied, 'No, I mean when she was here in 1934.'" Bobby rose from his chair, went to the telephone, called FDR Jr., who was a friend of JFK's, and asked him to join the campaign. I remain convinced to this day that it was God's son saying that it was OK to vote for a Catholic that accounted more than anything else for our amazing comeback.

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Making it Uncool

Laughter is our best weapon in the war on teen smoking

BY ROBERT WORTH

ON THE SURFACE, LAST NOVEMBER'S $206 billion settlement agreement between the tobacco companies and 46 states looks like a serious blow for Big Tobacco. In addition to the money, it contains some important concessions: a ban on outdoor advertising, limits on sports sponsorships and merchandising, no more "product placement" in movies, and they have to close The Tobacco Institute and other junk-science instruments. And Joe Camel—along with all other cartoon characters—is gone for good.

Yet how much did all this hurt the tobacco industry's ability to sell cigarettes? On November 20, the day the attorneys general announced the settlement, the stock of the leading tobacco companies soared. After all, the Big Four tobacco makers will pay only 1 percent of the damages (at most) directly; the rest will be passed on to smokers through higher prices. Since many states are already figuring the settlement money into their budgets, this puts them in the odd position of depending on the continued health of the tobacco industry for their roads, schools, and hospitals.

Punishing the industry, in other words, doesn't necessarily address the root of the problem—reducing demand for cigarettes. And that won't go down until we all face the fact that smoking is once again *cool.* When I went to high school, in the 1980s, scarcely any of my classmates smoked. My two teenage cousins claim that at least *half* of their friends smoke, despite a heavy barrage of anti-smoking publicity. They're not unusual: According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, teen smoking rose 73 percent from 1988 to 1996.

Anti-smoking activists often behave as though the tobacco companies were entirely to blame for this fact—as though charisma were a substance like nicotine that could be injected and removed from a product at will. Sadly, that's not true. As long as movie stars like John Travolta and Uma Thurman flirt gorgeously through a haze of cigarette smoke, as long as it drifts through all the right nightclubs and bars and hang-outs—not to mention the magazines and posters and billboards—teenagers will find ways to smoke, no matter how many public service announcements or laws are written to stop them. Most of these kids know that smoking fills their lungs with toxins like arsenic, cyanide, and formaldehyde. They'll even recite the statistics to you: Smoking kills over 1,000 people a day in this country alone, and is far deadlier, in terms of mortality rates, than any hard drug. And then they'll blow their smoke into your face. "Kids can't imagine themselves old," says Stanton Glantz, an anti-smoking activist and professor at the University of California at San Francisco. "Health effects mean almost nothing to them."

The only way to get any leverage with teenagers is to return fire with fire, taking on the various influences that make smoking seem attractive. We need, in other words, to find new ways to make smoking look ridiculous.

As it happens, we have some clues about how to do that. Flash back to the 1960s, when cigarette ads were as common on television as they are now on billboards or bus-stops. If you ask any man in his 40s or older about the tobacco ads of that day, he'll almost certainly remember one series in particular: the Marlboro Man ads. Set to the music from the great Western "The Magnificent Seven," they brought the celebrated smoking cowboy to life as he roped calves in a gold and red-hued western sunset. They conjured up the untrammeled masculinity of the cowboy myth so masterfully that few who ever saw them have forgotten them. And their message was unmistakable: Real men smoke.

Then, in 1968, another ad appeared on television. This one began with a cowboy standing in a

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darkened saloon, watched by a low-life villain with a gun (and a cigarette in his mouth). Another gunslinger enters, a cigarette hanging from his lips. "We figured you'd be here," he tells the hero. The bad men are on the verge of gunning the hero down, when one of them begins to wheeze. Soon both of them are doubling over in coughing fits, and the hero strolls past them, unharmed, out of the saloon. The words "American Cancer Society" appear on the screen, and the announcer intones "Cigarettes—they're killers."

This ad may seem laughably unsophisticated to the current generation of media-soaked teenagers, but in its day it managed to make the Marlboro Man ads look utterly ridiculous. And along with a group of similarly inspired anti-smoking ads that ran at the same time, it appears to have had a measurable effect. Starting in 1967, when the anti-smoking ads first aired on television, and ending in 1970, when they went off, per capita cigarette consumption dropped four years in a row—something that had not happened since the turn of the century. Naturally, there were other reasons for this decline, but researchers tend to agree that the ads were a powerful factor. They also permeated the culture in ways that can't be quantified, making people less likely to associate cigarettes with glamour. In Hollywood movies, where smoking had been *de rigeur* for decades, cigarettes disappeared like the hats from mens' heads. Only 29 percent of movie characters smoked in the 1970s, according to Stanton Glantz —less than half as many as before or since.

That's why the best thing in last November's settlement may be its creation of a national foundation, funded at $25 million a year, designed to "Develop, disseminate, and test the effectiveness of counter advertising campaigns." If we can use that money to create an ad campaign as powerful as the one that aired three decades ago, we just might kill the Marlboro myth for good.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

Equal Time

The first great anti-smoking ad campaign began on Thanksgiving Day 1966, when a young lawyer named John Banzhaf III was watching a football game. A cigarette ad came on—probably for Marlboros. It showed "handsome, rugged men confidently smoking cigarettes in an outdoor western setting. It implied that any man who wanted to be truly masculine should smoke cigarettes." It made Banzhaf mad, and he decided to "do whatever I could to wipe out those evil commercials." He chose as his weapon the Federal Communications Commission's now-defunct Fairness Doctrine, which held that when covering controversial topics broadcasters had to give time to opposing views. It had never been applied to commercials before, but the FCC ruled in Banzhaf's favor. By 1967 broadcasters were airing one anti-smoking ad for every four cigarette ads, on prime time television.

Most of the ads were produced by the American Cancer Society and the American Lung Association, and they were so good that the tobacco industry began to panic. "The opinion of many top-level tobacco people," one former tobacco executive told a reporter in 1969, "is that as things stand they'd just as soon have cigarette commercials banned if by that they could in effect get the anti-smoking commercials

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banned, too." When it became clear that smoking rates were indeed dropping, the tobacco chiefs asked Congress to ban them from television, much against the will of the broadcasters, who stood to lose hundreds of millions of dollars a year. (The tobacco companies didn't want to withdraw voluntarily, because that might confer a market advantage on those who stayed.) The industry figured that once those pesky counter-ads were gone the decline in smoking would stop. They were right.

They were clever too, because cigarettes *didn't* really disappear from television. With all the money they saved on ads (close to $800 million a year in current dollars), the tobacco companies managed to make sure that major sports events would occur against the backdrop of a massive cigarette ad. They sponsored tennis tournaments and drag races; they poured ads into newspapers and magazines; they papered highways and inner cities with untold acres of billboards. They crafted new brands to specific demographics—Eve, Misty, and Capri for women, following the 1968 launch of Virginia Slims; Uptown and Kool for blacks; American Spirit for native Americans.

By the 1980s, the tobacco industry was reclaiming Hollywood with a full-court effort to "place" their products in movies. One of the documents uncovered in Minnesota's suit against the industry last year made this particularly graphic, stating that "product was supplied" by Phillip Morris for more than 190 movies between 1978 and 1988. The company calls them "donations," and it's true that no records of payment were ever found. But if that's true, why did the same company shell out $350,000 to place Lark cigarettes in the James Bond film "License to Kill" in 1988?

Movie industry spokesmen claim that product placement hasn't happened since 1990, and last November's settlement explicitly forbids it. And it should be said that Hollywood directors are far more likely to be slaves to fashion than to the tobacco industry. But whatever the reason, by the mid-1990s, Hollywood movies were once again filled with smoke. According to the American Lung Association, in 133 top movies produced in 1994 and 1995, 82 percent of the lead or supporting characters smoke.

When challenged about their use of cigarettes in films, directors tend to offer the excuse that smoking is sometimes necessary to build character. If that's true, why wasn't it the case in the 1970s? After all, that decade produced some of the greatest movies of recent times. In some popular movies of the past few years, the smoking seems laughably gratuitous. Couldn't James Cameron have found a more interesting way of manifesting Leonardo DiCaprio's rebelliousness in "Titanic" than by having him smoke like a chimney? In "My Best Friend's Wedding" Julia Roberts chain-smokes despite the fact that she's playing a food critic. Many of these directors aren't really worried about building character; they're just plain lazy.

Actors and directors also tend to downplay their influence over kids. "I don't apologize for smoking onscreen," Winona Ryder told *USA Today* last year. "It should be our choice, and I don't think we influence people to smoke." Maybe so. But consider: The Ray Ban company saw 55 percent gains after Tom Cruise donned a pair of their sunglasses in "Risky Business." Sales of "Reese's Pieces" candy jumped 65 percent after they appeared in Stephen Spielberg's blockbuster "E.T." Why should cigarettes be any different?

Up in Smoke

In fairness to Hollywood, the anti-smoking movement itself probably deserves some of the blame for recent increases in teen smoking. Like so many social crusaders before them, they've occasionally lapsed into self-righteousness—thereby inviting teens to take up cigarettes as the torch of fashionable rebellion. They have supported laws that allow police to arrest and fine teenagers caught with cigarettes—a foolish strategy that blames the young smoker instead of the marketers. They have encouraged businesses to discriminate against smokers. They have lobbied to have cigarettes regulated like hard drugs, or even banned outright—thereby demonstrating that they've learned nothing from the War on Drugs, or, for that matter, from the great failed experiment in temperance that began in 1919. "They have become prohibitionists," says Dr. Alan Blum, a Baylor physician who is one of the greatest and most clear-eyed anti-smoking activists. In the process, they've only hurt themselves—because once you start acting like Miss Watson you cast smokers in the role of Huckleberry Finn.

The tobacco companies, never slow to learn a PR lesson, have worked hard in recent years to dress their product as forbidden fruit. They've supported laws that allow police to arrest and fine teenagers caught with cigarettes, and promised not to oppose them as part of last November's settlement. And they've launched massive campaigns that are designed, supposedly, to combat teen smoking. The new $100 million Phillip Morris campaign, which had its television launch in December, is titled "Think, Don't Smoke,"

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and it focuses on persuading teens to resist peer pressure.

Think? Resist peer pressure? This is a little like marketing chastity belts; you create an incentive where there may not have been one. The truth is that most teenagers don't feel much peer pressure to smoke, because the majority of teens don't do it. But with the tobacco companies telling them they've got to exercise massive self-restraint in order to *not* smoke, well, hey—maybe it's worth trying after all.

The R.J. Reynolds anti-smoking campaign is equally disingenuous. It's true, as one RJR spokesman told me, that they've mailed out half a million "We Card" kits to retailers. But the premise of the campaign—that parents should simply tell their children not to smoke—is absurd. "We have a unit on how to talk to your kids about smoking even if you *do* smoke," the spokesman told me.

The tobacco companies, never slow to learn a PR lesson, have worked hard in recent years to dress their product as forbidden fruit.

Ultimately, this message is just a subtler form of marketing. "When I was a kid it was 'Lucky Strike separates the men from the boys,'" the great anti-smoking ad writer Tony Schwartz told me. "Now [the tobacco companies] tell people 'Kids shouldn't smoke, that's for adults.' Isn't the message the same?" Ironically, the very first television anti-smoking commercial, which Schwartz created in 1963, hit this theme. The ad featured a pair of children dressing up in their parents' clothes—long white dress for the girl, suit and top hat for the boy, and posing in front of a mirror. "Children love to imitate their parents," the announcer says. "Children learn by imitating their parents. Do you smoke cigarettes?"

This ad, which ran frequently during the late '60s, is often cited as one of the great PR successes of that era. Unfortunately, it doesn't answer the question of how to reach kids themselves.

Mocking Word

How, then, to persuade teenagers not to pick up the habit? There's no single formula, says Jeff McKenna, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of Smoking and Health, which tracks anti-smoking efforts and their effectiveness. But the best approach seems to be the one that worked back in the late '60s: satire. California, which funds anti-smoking commercials with the proceeds of a 25-cent cigarette surtax passed in 1988, has led the way in this area. One of their recent ads features a group of dapper young men in tuxes who light their cigarettes as a gorgeous young woman walks in. As the announcer tells us about the link between smoking and impotence, their cigarettes suddenly go limp—and the woman looks mockingly at them and walks away. "Cigarettes," the announcer says. "Still think they're sexy?"

Direct satires of the tobacco industry have also been touted as a way to persuade kids that smoking isn't as rebellious as they may think. "What we've found is that when kids understand they're being manipulated by the industry, it takes the desirability of the rebellion away," says Colleen Stevens, who directs the California Health Department's antismoking media campaign. The first and most celebrated ad in the California television campaign hit this theme hard. It shows a smoky boardroom full of tobacco executives, one of whom announces: "Gentlemen, gentlemen, the tobacco industry has a very serious multi-billion dollar problem...[e]very day 2,000 Americans stop smoking and another 1,100 also quit. Actually, technically, they die. That means this business needs 3,000 fresh volunteers every day. So forget about all that heart disease, cancer, emphysema, and stroke stuff. We're not in this business for our health." Another ad simply showed footage of tobacco industry executives testifying before Congress that they believed tobacco was not addictive. The words "under oath" flash on the screen during the testimony, and as the ad closes the announcer intones: "Now the tobacco industry is trying to tell us that second hand smoke isn't dangerous."

More recently, other states have followed California's lead. Massachusetts, which passed its own cigarette surtax in 1992, ran an ad featuring Victor D. Noble, a scientist who did important work on the health risks of smoking, telling the camera how the tobacco industry shut him down. Another shows Victor Crawford, a former tobacco lobbyist, confessing "I lied." Other ads feature a cancer-victim singing "Happy Birthday" to the tobacco industry through his

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throat-hole; a child smoking, accompanied by the legend "They knew. They always knew"; and a quote from an RJR draft memo suggesting that warning labels on cigarette packs could actually be an enticement to kids. Last year Florida used the money from its own separate settlement with the industry to establish a campaign directed by teenagers. Designated the "Truth" campaign, it is explicitly targeted at the tobacco industry's alleged manipulation of kids.

It's too early to tell how effective these efforts will be, but the early signs from California—the longest-running campaign—are good. Since it began, teen smoking in California has remained stable, even as it shot up in the rest of the country. The overall effect has been even more striking: Cigarette consumption has declined by 38 percent, or more than twice as much as the 16 percent decline in the rest of the country. Although the Massachusetts campaign is younger, it appears to have been effective too; teen smoking rates have risen far less than in the rest of the country.

Both states are quick to point out that media campaigns aren't everything; they've also worked hard to restrict smoking in public places, and to create education and community programs. Still, the power of the ads can be measured by what happened when they went off the air in California. Soon after the ad featuring the Congressional tobacco testimony first appeared, R.J. Reynolds threatened to sue both the state department of health services and the stations that aired it. The health department stood firm, and Reynolds backed down. But Gov. Pete Wilson (who's been described in internal Phillip Morris documents as "tobacco-friendly") pressured the department to stop running its anti-industry satires. He also insisted that the health department not use the words "lies" or "tobacco industry" in any of its ads, and he began to drain off the money allocated for the antismoking campaign for other purposes. Soon afterward, cigarette consumption began to rise, and youth smoking rates climbed nearly 20 percent.

Putting it Out

These campaigns represent a promising start. But as the California example suggests, they're vulnerable to political meddling. At the national level too, the tobacco industry, with typical agility, has found a way to undermine them. Buried deep in last November's settlement agreement is a clause stating that the money spent on anti-smoking ads through a national foundation created by the settlement for that purpose shall be used "only for public education and advertising regarding the addictiveness, health effects, and social costs related to the use of tobacco products and shall not be used for any personal attack on, or vilification of, any person (whether by name or business affiliation), company, or governmental agency, whether individually or collectively."

In other words, the settlement bars the kinds of ads that have been so successful in California and Massachusetts. The restriction isn't watertight—it only applies to the foundation created by the settlement, and states could use other funds to pay for anti-smoking campaigns. But that's not likely, given that the foundation is slated to get $25 million a year for education and media purposes. And many states have already made it clear that they intend to use the rest of the money to fill gaps in their budgets. New York City plans to use its share to clean up public schools, Los Angeles wants to repair its sidewalks, Louisiana will reduce the state debt, and Kentucky may use some of its money to help ailing tobacco farmers. Many of these states may find themselves running toothless anti-smoking campaigns—which is precisely what the tobacco industry wants. "If you want to see a recipe for failure, look at the settlement," says Stan Glantz.

That's why the states should take a second look at what really works when it comes to cutting back on smoking, and renegotiate or find a clear way around the restriction on attack ads. The federal lawsuit of the tobacco companies—which Clinton announced in his State of the Union speech—could provide another angle of attack. For starters, Clinton and the state attorneys general could point out that one of the stated purposes of the anti-smoking foundation created by November's settlement is to figure out which ads work best, regardless of their content. If attacking the industry proves consistently to be the best way to cut teen smoking rates, then there's no reason not to do it.

But most of all, we need to find new ways to make the truth about smoking come alive—and that means bringing the best minds on Madison Avenue to bear on the problem. It shouldn't be so hard: This is the generation reared on Monty Python, *Wacky Packs*, and *Mad* and *Spin* magazines. If we can make cigarettes seem laughable, we just might provide an example for countries like China, where 70 percent of men smoke and one in three is projected to die of smoking-related diseases within the next few decades. After all, once you reach that point it's almost too late for laughter. As one Adbusters satire of the short-lived Dakota cigarette brand put it: "Dakota. Dacough. Dacancer. Dacoffin." ○

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If Philip Morris **really** didn't want kids to smoke...

It would dump the Marlboro Man.

Philip Morris has brought out yet another "youth anti-smoking program" with big money, TV ads and pious language.

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The AMA's Cigarette PAC

Why does the American Medical Association support pro-tobacco candidates?

By Joshua Sharfstein

During the campaign season that culminated in November's election, those senators who blocked comprehensive tobacco control legislation sponsored by Arizona Republican John McCain were rewarded with thousands of dollars in contributions from cigarette manufacturers—and thousands more from U.S. physicians.

Strange bedfellows, indeed. According to Federal Election Commission records published by the Center for Responsive Politics, the American Medical Association's political action committee (known as "AMPAC") gave over $8,500, on average, to senators facing reelection who helped kill McCain's proposal in June. The defeat of this legislation, which would have increased cigarette taxes and granted the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco products, effectively ended tobacco control efforts in the 105th Congress.

By comparison, AMPAC gave less than $2,500, on average, to senators up for reelection who had tried to move the McCain bill forward. That's more than a 3:1 ratio in favor of pro-tobacco senators and begs the question: Why does a group that represents 250,000 physicians preferentially fund the supporters of an industry that annually kills 400,000 Americans?

No scientific reversal explains the AMA's backing of tobacco's friends on Capitol Hill. The nation's largest physicians group remains committed, in the words of a recent leader, to "take the war to the tobacco companies in every way that we can." In addition to supporting anti-smoking initiatives, the AMA has called for investors to divest from tobacco stocks and for politicians not to accept money from the tobacco industry. After the Senate vote in June, Dr. Randolph D. Smoak, Jr. of the AMA's Board of Trustees, declared that his organization "deeply regrets the Senate's failure to pass landmark anti-tobacco legislation."

Yet not a month later, AMPAC contributed thousands to help pro-tobacco Senators Kit Bond from Missouri and Sam Brownback from Kansas beat back Democratic challengers. The PAC then went on to give the legal maximum—$10,000—to Ben Nighthorse-Campbell, a Colorado Republican who voted to block the McCain proposal and who faced an anti-tobacco opponent.

In the 1997-98 campaign, AMPAC did not support Nevada Sen. Harry Reid, a Democratic floor leader for tobacco legislation who declared in the Senate that "every day we waste in this Congress on something other than tobacco, we are addicting 3,000 children." But AMPAC did contribute the full $10,000 to Reid's challenger John Ensign, a House member who publicly opposed comprehensive tobacco control in May "because as soon as you support a cigarette tax, the tobacco states come back and say, 'Let's go for a gaming tax.'"

Politics, not science, explains the seemingly strange PAC contributions of a medical organization that has never fully reconciled its dual goals of supporting the health of Americans and protecting the income of physicians. About 50,000 AMA members contribute directly to AMPAC, which is officially affiliated with the AMA and overseen by a board appointed by the AMA's own board of trustees. AMPAC works with state medical societies to identify candidates for its generous support. In 1997-98, AMPAC contributed over $2.3 million to federal candidates, placing it in the top 10 of all national political action committees, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Despite the AMA's claim that AMPAC is bipartisan, over two-thirds of its direct contributions (and 98 percent of its soft money for political parties) wind up in Republican pockets. AMPAC's treasurer, Kevin Walker, is a former Repub-

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lican campaign operative who confided to *Campaigns & Elections* magazine in 1995 that his political heroes are Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher.

AMPAC's promotional material states that its goal is "to support and elect pro-medicine candidates on the federal level." But while the AMA's official slogan is "physicians dedicated to the health of America," AMPAC's might as well be, "You don't have to be anti-tobacco to be pro-medicine."

In the late '80s and early '90s, the AMA strongly fought limits on physician charges under the Medicare program, and AMPAC contributions flowed generously to political conservatives who opposed government intervention in the health care market. These representatives generally backed the tobacco industry. As a result, AMPAC wound up giving larger contributions to House members who voted to use federal funding for promotion of tobacco exports—despite an AMA policy opposing such legislation. (I first reported this finding with my father, a Baltimore psychiatrist, in the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1994.)

After the Republicans took over Congress, the AMA set its sights on achieving its long sought-after goal of tort reform. To convince Congress to limit non-economic (also known as "pain and suffering") damages in malpractice suits to $250,000, the group led what its newspaper called an "intense lobbying effort" consisting of phone banks, fax alerts, and full-page advertisements "starring a cadre of former federal health luminaries."

AMA-backed malpractice legislation came to a vote twice in the 104th Congress—with AMPAC watching closely. House members who voted for malpractice limits both times received an average of $6,885 in the 1996 campaign, compared to $3,647 if they voted for it once, and $553 if not at all. Just a coincidence? AMPAC treasurer Walker told *Campaigns & Elections* that his "best day" on the job came when the House finally passed the $250,000 liability cap. And an editorial in the AMA's newspaper specifically credited the victory to the "long-term commitment of time and financial resources needed to open and maintain access to lawmakers."

House members who voted for the AMA's malpractice limits also tended to back Big Tobacco—probably because many supporters of limited liability for doctors also want the same for cigarette manufacturers. As a result, in the 1996 campaign, AMPAC contributed over twice as much, on average, to opponents of FDA regulation of tobacco products as to supporters. A statistical analysis (that I published in the *American Journal of Public Health*) demonstrated that AMPAC's marked preference for pro-tobacco members could be attributed entirely to their positions on AMA-backed malpractice legislation.

Despite a lobbying blitz from the AMA, legislation limiting malpractice awards died in the Senate. No surprise then that AMPAC heavily favored presumably "pro-medicine" Senate candidates over their anti-tobacco counterparts in the subsequent election.

When made aware of AMPAC's record on tobacco, AMA leaders have not pointed to any election time or place where their PAC's contributions have actually supported the public health. Instead, they've argued that to contrast public health goals and AMPAC contributions "is to compare not apples and oranges but apples and hippopotamuses." By compartmentalizing public health and professional activities, the AMA hopes to be seen as an advocate for patients as well as an effective trade organization for physicians. Thus, Dr. Smoak of the Board of Trustees, a South Carolina surgeon who once headed his state's chapter of the American Cancer Society, is also praised on the AMA's web site for leading AMPAC (at a time the group gave significantly more to tobacco supporters in Congress).

But the AMA can only ignore the hippopotamus in its boardroom for so long. AMPAC's bankrolling of tobacco industry allies undermines many dedicated physicians at the AMA who hope to use the authority of the organization to further the public health. How seriously can elected officials take the health exhortations of an organization that gives out contributions based on support for physicians' financial interests and not patients' well being?

AMPAC dollars may even give election-time cover to pro-tobacco candidates. In the 1998 campaign, New York Democrat Edolphus Towns was criticized by an opponent for receiving thousands in tobacco contributions and voting consistently to support the industry. Towns defended himself by citing all the money he had received from medical PACs (which included the AMA), adding, "If you're talking about dollars to influence, then I would have to be called the health-care congressman."

The AMA loses credibility as a public health organization every time its PAC conspires to keep the Marlboro Man's friends in Congress. Yet if the nation's largest physician organization led other health care PACs in divesting politically from pro-tobacco representatives, then the amount of campaign funding available to advance the public health would dwarf even cigarette manufacturers' contributions.

Sound crazy? It'd just be a group of doctors taking their own medicine.

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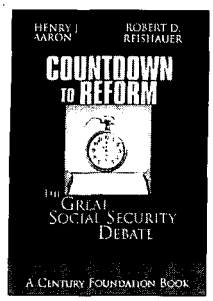

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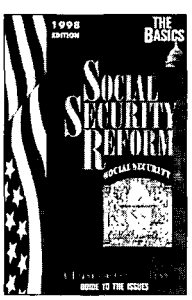

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The GDP Myth

Why "growth" isn't always a good thing

BY JONATHAN ROWE & JUDITH SILVERSTEIN

GEORGE ORWELL REALLY DID SEE IT coming. "As soon as certain topics are raised," he wrote, "the concrete melts into the abstract." Nowhere does it melt more quickly than in economics.

Public discussion of the economy is a hothouse of evasive abstraction. Opinionators and politicians rarely name what they are talking about. Instead they waft into generalities they learned in Economics 101.

The President's State of the Union Address was a case in point. The President boasted of the "longest peacetime expansion of our history." That's how pols always talk. It sounds like truly wonderful news. But what actually has been expanding? A lot of things can grow, and do. Waistlines grow. Medical bills grow. Traffic, debt, and stress all grow. We can't know whether an "expansion" is good or not unless we know what it includes. Yet the President didn't tell, and the media hordes didn't ask, which was typical too.

A human economy is supposed to advance well-being. That is elementary. Yet politicians and pundits rarely talk about it in those terms. Instead they revert to the language of "expansion," "growth," and the like, which mean something very different.

Cut through the boosterism and hysterics, and growth means simply "spending more money." It makes no difference where the money goes, and why. As long as the people spend more of it, the economy is said to "grow."

The technical term for this is "Gross Domestic Product" or GDP, which gives the proceedings an atmosphere of authority and expertise. But it doesn't take a genius to smell the fish. Spending more money doesn't always mean life is getting better. Often it means things are getting worse.

This is exceedingly hard for most commentators to grasp. It simply does not fit with the story line we learned in the economics texts. A number of writers have argued, for example, that things are much better than Americans realize, and that only a jaundiced and elitist media obscures this fact.

Yes, there is a Cassandra industry of issue groups on both Left and Right that raise money on dire warnings. Yes, the media gets more attention with bad news than with good. But that doesn't mean Americans are wrong when they tell pollsters that they are concerned abut the direction of the nation, even though their own economic fortunes are pretty good. When one looks at what is actually growing in America today, that view makes a lot of sense.

Consider a few examples.

The Flab Factor

To put this delicately, Americans are becoming quite ample. Over half of us are overweight. The portion of middle-aged Americans who are clinically obese has doubled since the 1960s; it is now one out of three. The number that is grossly overweight—that is, can't fit into an airline seat—has ballooned 350 percent over the past thirty years.

That's a lot of girth, and a prodigious source of growth. Food is roughly a $700 billion industry in the United States, counting agriculture, supermarkets, restaurants and the rest. Unfortunately, a good deal of that industry ends up inside us Americans. The result is flab, and a diet and weight loss industry of some $32 billion nationwide and—yes—growing.

Richard Armey, the House majority leader and an economist, has opined that "the market is rational and the government is dumb." Here's a bit of rationality for him. The food industry spends some $21 billion a year on advertising to goad us to eat more.

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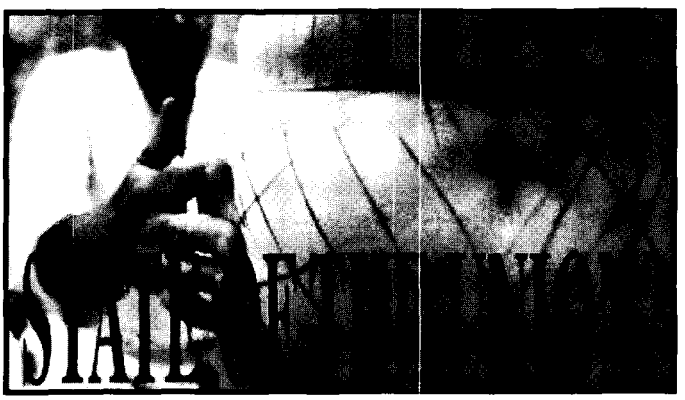
Then we spend that and half again trying to rid ourselves of the inevitable effects.

When diets and treadmills don't work, which is often, there's always the vacuum pump or knife. Cosmetic surgery is another booming sector, and much of it aims to detach unwanted pounds. There were roughly 110,000 liposuctions in the nation last year, at a cost of some $2,000 or more apiece. At five pounds per, that's 275 tons of flab up the tube. Pack it in, vac it off; it's pretty rational, especially if you are in the packing or the vacking business—or if, as in Armey's case, you get campaign contributions from those quarters.



Girth is one growth sector with a bright future. With Channel One and billboards filling schools with junk food ads, and with computers joining TV as a sedentary claim on time, kids are becoming broad of beam like their folks. The Surgeon General says childhood obesity is "epidemic," which is bad for kids but good for growth. Clothing lines for the "husky" child are expanding, as are summer camps for overweight youngsters. Type II diabetes, the kind associated with weight, has quadrupled among kids since 1982, which is a boost for the pharmaco-medical establishment.

Meanwhile, eating disorders such as bulimia have become a growth sector unto themselves. Bulimia may be the trademark affliction of the growth era. It is a disease of literal obedience to the schizoid messages that barrage young girls: indulge yourself wantonly but also be taut and svelte. The teen magazines make the economy grow, and then the treatment for bulimia makes it grow more.

Medical Costs

If Clinton's clunky medical insurance proposal did nothing else, it at least put the medical insurance industry on good behavior for a while. Those days appear to be over. The Health Care Financing Administration says that nationwide, outlays for medical treatment are likely to double over the next decade. Many small employers already are getting hit with hikes of 20 percent or more.

That means more than a sixth of the economy as conventionally measured will be devoted to treating disease. Not only is that major GDP; it's also a product of GDP. C. Everett Koop, the Surgeon General in the Reagan Administration, has said that some 70 percent of the nation's medical bill stems from preventable illnesses—that is, ones that are mainly lifestyle induced. We eat too much, drink too much, smoke too much, watch too much TV, absorb too much stress, and dump too many toxic substances into our air and water.

We are literally growing ourselves sick, and the resulting medical bills make the economy grow more. A study by the American Public Health Association a few years ago found that the United States could cut its medical costs by $17 billion a year if we all cut our daily intake of fat by just 8 grams, the amount in half a cup of premium ice cream.

"One way to reduce health costs is to get people to use the health care system less frequently," Dr. Koop said sensibly—but not rationally by Armey's standard. If people watched less TV, drove less, ate less but more healthfully, there would be less growth. So instead we resort to high-tech—and expensive—drugs and treatments to undo what we have done.

Such Service

When politicians crow about an expanding economy they make a big assumption—that people actually get something for the money they spend. That's life in the economics textbooks but not in the world we inhabit. W. Steven Albrecht, an accounting professor at Brigham Young University, estimates that white-collar fraud costs us some $200 billion a year. (The yearly take of burglars and robbers is more like $4 billion.) That estimate is probably low. Americans lose at least $40 billion a year to telemarketing fraud alone.

In an era of deregulation and belief in benign "market forces," the toll gets steadily worse. Phone bills and the like have become horrendously complex, for example. The Federal Communications Commission received 10,000 calls a month in the first five months of last year from people who couldn't understand their bills. The complexity has spawned a prac-

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tice called "cramming" in which third parties slip phony charges for dating services, psychic help lines and the like into a generic category in the bill.

Then there are the no-armed bandits that operate on practically every street corner under the alias "ATM machines". When banks began to install these in the late 1970s they promised lower costs and therefore lower fees. Today we literally have to pay for access to our own money, and increasingly we pay twice.

The average bank customer in the United States pays over $150 a year in ATM fees, according to a study by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group. In California alone, ATM users pay over $1.5 billion a year, or as much as people making between $30,000 and $50,000 pay in state income taxes.

In their unfailing instinct for euphemism, economists call this a "service" industry. Banks pay us 1 to 2 percent for our deposits, loan the money to someone else at up to 18 percent, and then they tax us when we take our own money back. Good service. Next time the pols start touting "tax cuts," let's hope our alert media friends think to ask them about the privatized tax systems like this that take those cuts away.

Pluck the Price-Payer

How do they get away with it? Wise investing doesn't hurt. Banking interests put some $17 million into the last federal elections, not counting in-kind payments, loans and "soft money" contributions to political parties and the like. It doesn't take a cynic to suspect a connection between such outlays and the ability of the banks to impose their money-access tax upon the rest of us.

When politicians hail the nation's "robust growth," they are talking in part about the robust flow of money to themselves. In California, campaign spending reached half a billion dollars this year, a new record. It is growing faster than major league baseball salaries. In national politics the cost of congressional campaigns has grown four times faster than the economy as a whole; and again, that's not counting "soft money." Few Americans would say that politics has gotten four times better over that time.

It is easy to forget that economically, the campaign finance system works much like the ATM machines: It gets us coming and going. First we provide the money that interest groups pass along to politicians. (The American Bankers Association doesn't pick its money from trees, but rather from us.) Next the pols support policies that enable such interest groups to extract still more from us. The pols get a cut of that extraction in the next round of campaign contributions, and the wheel turns again.

Debt

Americans have a new role in the world. No longer are we the arsenal of democracy, the sturdy producers of Depression-era murals. We are now consumers, the insatiable maws whose buying keeps the world economy afloat. "Amid the turmoil [in Asia]," *The Wall Street Journal* reports, "the U.S. consumer is emerging as a savior of sorts." Jim Hoagland of *The Washington Post* called this consumer "a truly heroic figure."

World salvation is serious business, and the United States fulfills this global obligation the way it has fought its wars—with borrowed money. Consumer debt has burgeoned in the United States. It has grown 73 percent since 1993 and is now some $1.5 trillion, which is about the size of the economy of France. (That doesn't even count home mortgages, which add about $3.8 trillion more.) The average American household has 11 credit cards and owes some $7,000 on them at any given time, plus the car loan and the mortgage.

If Americans feel apprehensive about the future, it just might be in part because they have burdened that future with debt. Yet debt is the Viagra of a growth economy in middle age. It provides an appearance of robust function when in reality we are borrowing ourselves into a financial hole.

First the buying itself makes the GDP go up. About half of retail sales today—some $1.4 trillion—are done with debt. Then there's the interest on consumer debt, which comes to over $150 billion a year and growing. Buy a car on time and you can end up paying more for the money than you do for the car. The GDP adds the two together and calls it growth. If Americans paid their bills on time, the money they saved on interest would amount to a 100 percent federal income tax cut for everyone making between $20,000 to $50,000 a year.

But less debt would mean less GDP. It also would mean less business for the satellite industries that have grown up around debt. According to the Small Business Administration, the fastest growing small business in the country over the next decade will be debt collection. Employment there will increase at twice the rate of small business as a whole. Curb debt and you reduce the need for people to collect the debt, which is bad for growth. You also reduce the need for debt counselors and bankruptcy lawyers. Bankruptcies have doubled over this decade, with more to come. "We're

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going to be happy next year, but nobody else is," said the president of the Bankruptcy Institute, a lawyers' organization.

Consumer debt is another growth sector with a big future. Banks send out over 800 million credit card solicitations every three months, which will come as no surprise to most Americans who receive mail. Today some 28 percent of households making under $10,000 a year have cards, and over half of college students. Students get free T-shirts and Frisbees in college registration lines if they sign up for cards. Of course, many of these students are already in debt for tens of thousands of dollars because of student loans.

In the eyes of the opinion class there is nothing wrong with this. To the contrary, in the words of the *Post*'s Hoagland, it means that we "consumers" will continue to shoulder the world's burdens "by continuing to borrow, spend and consume with impressive single-mindedness." The only danger is that we might become less debt prone, but our banks are on the job. They are starting to punish customers who pay their bills on time. These conscientious citizens are now "freeloaders" who must bear extra fees, shortened grace periods, even cancellation of their cards.

Growing Nowhere

Clichés become that for a reason. When people associate growth with traffic, it's because that's how they experience it in their lives. Traffic is a plague; but it's both a result of growth and also a big source of it. In the strange abstracted world of economics, a plague is good so long as it makes us spend more money.

In California, pace-setter in traffic as in other things, drivers are experts on this subject. Los Angeles has been the most car-congested city in the country for 14 years running, and the rest of the state is not far behind. It's a lot of annoyance, but also a lot of gas. Angelenos alone burn over $800 million a year in gas while they sit in traffic and fume, and Americans generally spend over $4 billion more. That's GDP and the economic future toward which much of urban America is headed.

Cars fume too, of course, which means bad air and respiratory diseases. LA leads the nation, if that's the word, in hospital admissions due to asthma, bronchitis, and other breathing problems, which adds to the state's staggering medical bill. More traffic also means more car crashes. There's a collision almost every minute on California's crowded roads, which helps make car wrecks a $130 billion a year industry in the United States.

Call it the multiplier effect of misery. Yet as the roads become more clogged, the auto makers are pushing sports utility vehicles that burn more gas, take up more space, and do more damage when they crash. But they cost a fortune and that adds to growth. Meanwhile, the traffic takes a heavy toll on the roads themselves. Maintaining them costs some $800 million a year in California, and $20 billion in the nation; California drivers spend some $1.2 billion a year on extra car repairs because the roads are in such bad shape.

That's all GDP. So too is at least part of the $35-40 billion the nation spends defending the foreign oil supplies that fuel all this misery and havoc.

Stress

Prosperity is supposed to bring satisfaction and peace. But today's version has led the other way. As the GDP has risen and the economy expands, Americans have felt more harried and under siege. Stress is a factor in over 70 percent of all doctor visits, according to the National Institute of Mental Health.

"Nearly every patient I see leads a life influenced in some way by inordinate levels of stress," writes Dr. Richard Swenson of the University of Wisconsin Medical School in his book *Margin*.

Stress is in large measure a product of the economy. It comes from the barrage of stimuli, the prolixity of choices, the pressures to perform and the multiplying claims upon our attention and time, which drive a rising GDP. Stress also is a producer of growth, in the form of an enlarging treatment industry of counselors, relaxation tapes, seminars, and spas. Sedatives and mood-enhancers of various kinds are roughly a $6 billion industry. Over 28 million Americans now use Prozac and kindred drugs. (Technically, Prozac is for depression. But the lines between depression and stress are blurry at best.)

Even kids are taking these drugs; at last count, some one-half million and rising. Whether that's good for kids is questionable; that it's good for growth is not. "Antidepressant makers need a new market as growth slows in the adult segment," *The Wall Street Journal* explained. A Bay Area teenager told what happens when a society redefines a whole generation as a drug market "segment." "Close to half of the 15- to 18- year-olds I know are on Prozac," she wrote in *YO!* Magazine. "Their parents will do anything to get their kids to achieve, behave, clean their rooms—whatever—including supplying them with the latest in personality-altering drugs."

A Simple Question

The more closely one looks the more one under-

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stands the feelings of ambiguity in the land. We are glad for jobs and a buoyant stock market. But we are uneasy about the world we are creating in the process. Is growth an unalloyed good when the fastest growing industry of the '90s is gambling? Not entirely coincidentally, the prison business is another booming sector. Since 1980 it has grown five times over. Inmate pay-phone calls alone yield over a billion dollars a year.

Even the mundane and once-innocuous elements of growth can give one pause today. Are we really happy about the aggressive marketing that makes kids obsessed with brand names? Clothing sales go up, but parents have to pay, and others too, sometimes dearly. In January, in Prince George's County, a Washington suburb, three teen-agers were shot within a single 20-minute period. In each case the object of the assult was an Eddie Bauer jacket. Police refer to such incidents as "fashion crime."

It's little wonder that politicians and pundits resort instinctively to the abstract when they talk about the economy. The particulars are turning into a somewhat murky soup. They keep telling us they can solve the nation's problems with more "growth." Yet increasingly problems are what the GDP consists of.

This syndrome has become an unacknowledged subtext in much of the daily news. The AP reported recently on a part of eastern Oregon that is the fastest growing in the state. The source of this prosperity? A state prison and a nerve gas incinerator, along with a Wal-Mart distribution center and a railroad maintenance yard. Similarly, there is a pesticide plant in Richmond, California that is owned by the Zeneca Group, an $8 billion corporation that also makes the breast cancer drug tamoxifen. Many researchers believe that pesticides, and the toxins created in the production of them, play a role in breast cancer.

"It's a pretty good deal," a local physician told the *East Bay Express*, a local weekly. "First you cause the cancer, then you profit from curing it." She was overstating of course, but the fact remains: both alleged cause and cure make the GDP go up.

Some economists would dismiss this as wrong headed. If people didn't spend their money on such things as cancer treatments and gas to stand still in traffic, they say, they'd spend it on something else. Growth would be the same or even more. In other words, we shouldn't worry about exactly what is growing because hypothetically it could be something else. The argument approaches professional self-parody. It is fine for those who have the luxury of dealing with the economy through computer models. But for the rest of us who have to deal with the economy in concrete terms, the question of what exactly is expanding matters a great deal.

This doesn't mean the end of growth. Rather, it means the end of the assumption that anything called "growth" is automatically good. It means a need to stop using a euphemistic language that has that assumption built in. Republicans argue, for example, that the government should use the budget surplus for tax cuts because individual Americans will use the money more "rationally" than the awful government would.

Maybe so. But to look at where the money actually goes these days gives one pause. Is it really more "rational" to feed traffic jams as opposed to investing more in other forms of transit? Does the high-growth industry of gambling really do more for the country than the lower growth industry (at least in the short term) of building new inner-city schools with bathrooms that work? Would more Eddie Bauer jackets really do more for the country than better teachers?

We won't even get to these questions unless we start talking about the economy as it is, rather than the way economists tend to think about it. The job is going to fall first to journalists, who frame the first draft of reality for the public mind. They've got to start to articulate the economy as *Americans experience it*; and to do this, reporters have got to cleanse their minds of the vocabulary and assumptions of economic doctrine and explore the economic dimension of our lives with uncluttered eyes.

That's a big assignment, but it starts with a very simple question. The next time a Jack Kemp, say, promises to double the rate of growth, as he did in the vice presidential debate in '96, don't call Brookings or Heritage to find out if it is possible in macroeconomic terms. Reporters must insist on details, as they would with any other story. Exactly what is going to double? Traffic? Consumer debt? Jet skis? The use of mood-altering pharmaceuticals? The next time the Commerce Department releases the GDP figures don't just call a Wall Street "analyst" for comment. Insist on knowing what those flows of money are leaving in their wake—that is, exactly what is growing and the effects. If official Washington doesn't have this data then find out why not.

People don't experience "growth." They experience the things that growth consists of; and that's where good reporting begins. Until reporters start to look at these issues from the standpoint of those who experience the economy rather than those who pontificate about it, they are going to remain where many readers think they are—in another world.

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Clinton Abroad

His record isn't perfect, but it's better than the experts think

BY JUREK MARTIN

IT IS NOT EXACTLY FASHIONABLE IN POLITE Washington society, if it still exists, to go around defending the conduct of American foreign policy by President Bill Clinton and his administration over the last six years. When Clinton took office in 1993, those who had presided over the final victories in the Cold War, the tearing down of the Berlin Wall, the liberation of eastern Europe, the unification of Germany, the triumph of the Gulf War—George Bush himself, James Baker, Brent Scowcroft, Dick Cheney and their senior deputies—joined the melange of foreign policy critics. They knew, and establishment Washington accepted, that foreign policy did not cost Bush re-election. Some scattered to the four winds—Bush into retirement, Baker back to Texas, Cheney into the oil business—but continued to speak out on occasion. Others stayed, Scowcroft and Larry Eagleburger taking up roles as Washington heavyweights-in-residence, while Michael Armacost and Richard Haas now run the once Democratic-leaning Brookings Institution.

What they brought to the party was an immediate and influential questioning of the qualities and qualifications that Clinton brought to the presidency. Whatever the new president's intelligence, education and catholic range of interests, he was elected for what he said about domestic policy, not about global issues. And because he was from Arkansas, forgetting Georgetown, Oxford and Yale, the foreign policy establishment suspected he was a country bumpkin unschooled in the sophisticated ways of the world. J. William Fulbright, the last Arkansan to cut any sort of foreign policy mustard, took years to graduate from southern reactionary to statesman, or so we were soberly reminded.

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Even those who gave him advice during that first campaign—Warren Christopher, Madeleine Albright, Sandy Berger, Tony Lake, all rewarded with significant slots in the administration—were not exactly considered strategic thinkers of the first water, at least according to the standards of their illustrious predecessors or those who thought they were more qualified to steer the nation's path in foreign troubled waters. In some cases, that initial criticism had validity.

It was this lack in the new administration of the "vision thing" that initially most excited the foreign policy commentariat. Navigating a post-Cold War world in flux, they said, needed a map and Clinton and his team did not have one, or, if they did, could not enunciate it. At least George Bush had proclaimed a "new world order" in the wake of the Gulf War and as the Soviet empire was collapsing and, though its structure was not always apparent, it conveyed a sense of purpose.

Clinton, by contrast, had initially immersed himself in domestic matters, did not even travel much overseas, except when he had to for G7 summits and the obligatory early visit to neighboring Mexico, and could not even much bestir himself even with the Balkans going to hell in a hand basket. Warren Christopher, no phrase-maker, seemed to see his role as secretary of state as primarily defensive rather than creative, forever going to the Middle East but mostly intent on keeping American troops out of foreign trouble spots, then principally the Balkans. At the National Security Council, Tony Lake was the soul of public discretion, the supportive team player rather than the independent power center that that office has frequently represented over the years, for good and ill.

That was the early rap on his foreign policy—in countless Op-Ed articles and in the foreign policy journals—and, Washington being Washington, it stuck like glue. Seven state of the union messages, so

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the mantra runs, have given short shrift to foreign policy: Albright has proved no more articulate an exponent of strategy than Christopher. So cynical has the capital become that Wag the Dog scenarios were blithely applied to the latest bombing of Iraq and to attacks on Osama bin Laden's alleged terrorist operations.

A New Game

But perhaps what these critics fail to understand is the fundamental transformation of the world in which we now live. On the Cold War chessboard, all moves appeared connected, be they in propping up dictators like Siad Barre in Somalia, undermining left wing regimes in Nicaragua or keeping a tenuous peace on the Korean peninsula. Now, absent a single nuclear or ideological enemy, foreign policy is more about discrete problem solving, particularly for America, which may be the only global superpower but which had renounced, even before Clinton came to office, any intention of being the world's policeman. Furthermore, deepening global economic interdependence has influenced foreign policy in ways hitherto unknown, particularly in Asia, Europe and Latin America. As the emphasis in foreign policy shifted from global ideological showdowns to regionally contained ethnic and economic flareups, the Clinton administration has found itself navigating an increasingly complex world in which U.S. interests are not so clearly defined.

Photo by Sandor Bodo - *Providence Journal*

Seen in this light, it is possible to arrive at a very different judgment of Clinton's foreign policy. To be sure, it is one which could not conceivably claim that this administration has been without fault in its handling of a complex world. The errors and omissions—from the Balkans and the Middle East, through Rwanda and Zaire and all the way to China and Japan—are too large to ignore or gloss over, as is sometimes this government's wont. Even the trumpeted achievements, such as the spread of democracy throughout the American hemisphere, Cuba excepted, can hardly be exclusively attributed to U.S. leadership. But the record can look better if placed in a localized context rather than a single overarching strategy.

Sometimes these problems are clearly connected, in the Balkans and the Middle East, for example, but sometimes they are not. There are those which are susceptible to American influence and those that are so indigenous in nature, China and Africa most obviously, as to appear impervious and intractable. Occasionally, the United States may be able to act on its own (hemispherically, with Haiti and Cuba) but more often in concert, with regional coalitions or under the umbrella of the United Nations or international financial institutions, as with Mexico and, now, Brazil. Congressional support or compliance, no longer a given since the Republicans gained control of Congress in 1994, has also proved a limiting factor, not least in relations with the United Nations. There is, in sum, no magic or universal formula to problem-solving, nor is there any guarantee of success. Most are works in progress, requiring constant attention, and with ups and downs part of the inevitable process.

On balance, the Clinton administration's record in problem-solving can stand scrutiny. That judgment starts with one area: economics. For the 20 years before

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Clinton took office, the United States was regularly assailed, even by its staunchest allies, for its inability to get its own economic house in order. The annual economic summits became fora for complaints that the magnitude of the US budget deficit was inimical to global economic health because the financing of it drew investment funds away from the countries where they might better be applied. It was almost as if the moral authority of the United States to lead the world was in question because it was itself defective in one central respect. In the 1980s, Japan even began to consider itself an economic "hegemon" on a par with the United States, virtuous and worthy of emulation where the military superpower was not.

That problem has been solved, at least for now, as America enters its age of budgetary surplus and debates how best to spend it. Since Clinton took office, the U.S. economy suddenly became, once again, the model that others might emulate. In adopting a common monetary policy and currency, the European Union implicitly acknowledged this fact, even as it occasionally groused about some of the ways in which the new American hegemony was being expressed. But when Robert Rubin, at the heart of Clinton's economic policy since the beginning, and Alan Greenspan speak, the world now does listen and even learn.

That clear leadership has been immeasurably helpful in dealing with the succession of international financial crises of the last five years, starting with Mexico, spreading through Asia and returning to South America. Not all remedies have proved as successful as the Mexican solution of early 1995. Indonesians may be politically better off without Suharto as president but millions of them have been thrown out of work by the now admittedly heavy-handed austerity programs demanded by the International Monetary Fund, over which the United States wields such authority. It has proved beyond the power of the Treasury, the IMF, the World Bank and western Europe to stop the economic and financial collapse of Russia. Powerful arguments are now being made, by Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard among others, that the Treasury and the IMF gave seriously bad advice to Brazil, precipitating its present crisis.

But, through it all, the strength of the U.S. economy, reflected on Wall Street, and the pick-up in western Europe have proved, so far, antidotes to the worst financial contagion. Some of the most endangered Asian tiger species, South Korea and Thailand, are showing signs of recovery. So might Japan, if its political class can get its act together, as there are recent small signs it may finally be.

In fairness to Clinton himself, it must be noted that his appreciation of the importance of the global economy—and the necessity of the United States being competitive in it—was laid on the table from the outset of his presidency. Two days before he was even sworn in, at a speech at Georgetown University, he declared that "economic security" would be a primary goal of his foreign policy, saying "We cannot sustain an active engagement abroad without a sound economy at home." That might have sounded platitudinous then, no more than a leftover campaign slogan. It does not look so today.

Of all the conventional foreign policy issues he inherited, Northern Ireland would hardly have ranked alongside the Balkans, Iraq, China and the Middle East peace process, nor even Somalia, to which Bush had sent the Marines two months earlier. If the United States had anything other than a Sunday Irish, St Patrick's Day policy, it was to fall in line behind the British and Irish governments and specifically to try and cut the flow of American funds to the IRA. When Clinton half-promised in the 1992 campaign to send an emissary to Northern Ireland, it was widely dismissed as a pitch for the Irish vote that would be conveniently forgotten as soon as he took office and learned to take his cue from London and Dublin.

Six years later, in the afterglow of a successful but still incomplete peace process, it is fashionable again to ascribe too little to the involvement of the Clinton administration, to say, as one British diplomat did recently, that while the United States had been "helpful," the real credit lay elsewhere. There is some truth to this. A whole set of objective circumstances were working towards some kind of reconciliation between north and south in Ireland, even between Protestants and Catholics. But it was Clinton and his team who had the nerve to set the negotiating ball rolling and the commitment to stay with it. It was a controversial decision to give Gerry Adams, the Sinn Fein leader, a visa to tour the United States and then to invite him to the White House. The State Department was viscerally opposed to this initiative. Warren Christopher did not like it, but, to his credit, never made his disagreement very public. But the likes of James Baker, Christopher's predecessor, had no reason to be reticent; nothing, he said, was worth alienating America's oldest ally and closest friend.

And the reaction from London was indeed severe. Personal relations between the new American president and Prime Minister John Major, never likely to be particularly warm given their differing personalities and politics, had been made even more sticky by

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reports that Major had connived in Republican attempts to investigate Clinton's passport records in London during the Vietnam War. Inviting Adams to the United States was immediately denounced as both Clinton's revenge and an unwarranted interference in domestic British affairs.

But the White House endured these slings and arrows and did its share of conciliation and head-banging. The basic Clinton faith—that the United States cannot impose peace but stands ready to help the local peacemakers—was vindicated, as his rapturously received and brilliantly executed visit to Ulster and the Irish Republic at the end of 1995 demonstrated. There has been no let-up since. George Mitchell was indispensable to last year's Easter Sunday agreement, as was his president working the middle of the night transatlantic telephone lines.

Problem solving may, of necessity, be directed at the immediate and short term. Neither the Dayton Accords of 1995 nor the Wye River agreement last year have brought permanent peace to the Balkans or the Israelis and Palestinians respectively. But the first did stop the slaughter in Bosnia, as has the subsequent presence of as many as 20,000 U.S. troops as part of the NATO peacekeeping force, and the second did arrest, for the moment, the rapid deterioration in the Middle East peace process. Each achieved, at least, their primary objectives and each required intensive American application, guided, in the first case, by Richard Holbrooke under presidential direction and in the second by Clinton himself.

In both cases, the longer term impact may be doubted. President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia is up to his old devious tricks in Kosovo, restrained but by no means rendered impotent by the threats of NATO air strikes. There is perilously little evidence that truly civil societies have been restored in an effectively partitioned Bosnia. Post-conflict resolution, the current buzz word among the humanitarian cognoscenti, remains in its infancy. Nor, as with Iraq, has the United States been particularly successful in rallying international support for military action, other than from Britain. Russia, previously reluctantly on board and contributing peacekeeping contingents, now seems more hostile.

Equally, the fate of the Middle East peace process now rests, in good measure,with an Israeli electorate that does not automatically answer to the American beck and call, as the defeat of Shimon Peres by Benjamin Netanyahu so amply demonstrated. One school of thought strongly believes that the Clinton administration has misplayed Netanyahu since he assumed power, missing opportunities to induce him to emulate the role of Menachem Begin at Camp David. But dissuading him from throwing the peace process into the Jordan River may be an achievement in itself. Nor can it be overlooked that Clinton persuaded the Palestinians to amend their own charter and delete the clause demanding the end of the existence of Israel.

In one respect, the unopposed invasion of Haiti in 1994 represents traditional American problem-solving in its own hemisphere. But no previous regional military intervention had been quite so explicit in its mission to restore a duly elected democratic government, the first in the island's hitory. It certainly stood in sharp contrast to longstanding American policy, which had been complaisant in its attitude to a succession of Haitian dictators and which, in the persons of such powerful senators as Jesse Helms, remained deeply antipathetic to the ousted president Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Five years later, Haiti may not be a Carribbean garden of eden, but the eviction of the brutal military regime was itself reasonable justification for action.

American crisis problem-solving has not been much directed at Africa, whose problems transcend most. There have been interesting subtle shifts in emphasis—away from the ancien regimes of Kenya and Zimbabwe and towards the more modern governments in Uganda and Rwanda—but they have yet to yield widespread dividends. It is also arguable that the Clinton administration placed too much hope in the ability of Nelson Mandela's South Africa to act as as a regional force for good. Glimmers of improvement in Nigeria more reflect internal dynamics than external influence, though the United States has been appropriately quick to encourage them.

The singular failure, acknowledged by Clinton when he was in Africa last year, was the unwillingness or inability to stop the genocide in the Great Lakes region of east and central Africa in 1994. The president was less than frank in his apology. The arguments used against intervention by Madeleine Albright, then ambassador to the United Nations, were based on Clinton's own Presidential Decision Directive 25, drawn up, in the wake of the debacle in Mogadishu in 1993, to limit U.S. involvement, in terms of personnel and finance, in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. It is a constraint that may now be militating against intervention to stop the current slaughters in Sierra Leone, Congo and Angola. But it is worth recalling, in offset, that the United States did propose the creation of a pan-African peace-keeping force, shot down by Mandela and

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probably premature in any case. The idea, however, is still on the table and one such contingent, the Nigerian-led ECOMOG in Sierra Leone, is functioning.

Force Majeure

Not all problem solving has worked. Saddam Hussein still sits in Baghdad, the U.N. inspection of his presumed weapons of mass destruction in Iraq probably broken beyond the point of return. But once the decision had been taken in 1991—correctly, whatever the subsequent events—not to evict him by force, containment became the only viable United States policy option. And he does remain isolated, without friends or supporters among his neighbors or, rhetoric aside, in the wider world.

Equally, internal events in Russia have predictably proved beyond the capacity of the United States, or the west acting in concert, to control or even much influence. The complaint of Russophiles that the expansion of NATO may yet provoke Russian nationalism and have severe adverse consequences for European and global security cannot be dismissed. But it is just as hard to make the opposite case that not broadening the western alliance would have had much impact on internal Russian political dynamics. In Russia, as elsewhere, all politics is mostly local.

Perhaps the most persistent criticism of Clinton foreign policy is that its very ad hoc nature, allied to its inconsistency in using, or threatening to use, force, has caused America to lose respect in, or to be feared by, the rest of the world. As Barbara Crosette wrote recently in *The New York Times*, even the humanitarian community, once so scornful of external military intervention but now looking at too many examples of unchecked brutality where relief workers are in constant peril, has found a new belief in the old Cold War slogan of "peace through strength." Kofi Annan, the U.N. secretary general, ascribed his (albeit temporary) success in Baghdad last February to diplomacy backed by the credible threat of military force. Richard Holbrooke made the same connection in Belgrade last autumn.

The American domestic appetite for a more forceful interventionist foreign policy in far-flung parts of the world where the national interest is not always apparent has yet to be tested. But the Buchananite put-up-the-shutters "America First" attitudes so prevalent as recently as 1996 appear to be on the wane, as witnessed by the fact Clinton himself has not been held accountable for breaking his promise to withdraw almost all American troops from Bosnia within 12 months of their deployment.

Force, actual or threatened, will not solve every problem. Even broad principles governing its use, while helpful to shaping the thinking and practical work of the U.S. military, may prove counterproductive and restrictive, as in the arguable case of PDD 25. In an ad hoc world, itself in flux, rules may be broken. The successes of Clinton's foreign problem-solving lie in part in breaking with American convention—in stressing the primacy of economics, intervening in Northern Ireland, recognizing the legitimate rights and obligations of the Palestinians, not leaving the Balkans for the Europeans to resolve alone, even showing an awareness of Africa. The hand at the tiller has not always been steady and only a knave or a fool would claim otherwise. But in the global warming of the post-Cold War era, these were always bound to be uncharted waters, even for the last remaining super power.

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Bad Prescription

Why privatizing Medicare may be hazardous to your health

BY KIP SULLIVAN

WHEN THE DEBATE OVER THE fate of Medicare heats up later this spring, you'll hear a familiar battle cry: The retirement of the Baby Boomers is sending Medicare into "bankruptcy" and it can only be "saved" by privatization. This claim is nonsense, but Republicans have been making it ever since they took over Congress in 1995. By the time you read this, the Republican position may have been endorsed by the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, a committee established by Congress to examine the Medicare "crisis." This commission was required to send its recommendations to Congress by March 1. Any recommendation must have the support of a supermajority of 11 of the commission's 17 members. It was clear by January 1999 that the privatization of Medicare had the support of 10 members. At a two-day meeting held January 5 and 6, eight of the commission's Republican appointees and two Democrats indicated their support for privatization.

At stake in the upcoming Medicare debate is not just the fairness and sufficiency of Medicare funding, but whether health care for America's elderly will be turned over to the insurance industry which has made such a mess of health care for the non-elderly. To judge from the privatizers' rhetoric, you would think that health care costs for the non-elderly were under control, that the number of uninsured Americans under 65 was falling, that quality of health care was improving, and that non-elderly Americans were thrilled with the restrictions imposed by the HMOs which have come to dominate the U.S. health care system. But the privatizers have it backwards: Medicare is more effective at controlling health care costs than the private sector is, and Medicare has achieved this level of efficiency without resorting to the private sector's favorite cost-control technique—denying necessary services to patients.

The claim that Medicare is going "bankrupt" is extremely misleading for two reasons. First, it implies that the insurance companies that now insure the non-elderly are more efficient than Medicare. That implication is false. Second, the "bankruptcy" rhetoric obscures a fundamental problem: Medicare draws a substantial portion of its funding from a 2.9 percent payroll tax which is unfair to working people. This tax is unfair because it is regressive (a tax is regressive if it takes a rising percent of income as income falls). If current law governing Medicare remains unchanged, this tax will have to be raised in the near future because the ratio of retirees to workers will increase as the Boomers retire. America should be debating how quickly we can replace the regressive payroll tax with a progressive tax, not how quickly we can privatize Medicare.

It is precisely because Medicare relies for 60 percent of its funding on an earmarked payroll tax that Medicare is vulnerable to bankruptcy rumors. The 2.9 percent payroll tax pays for hospital services provided by Medicare. (The other 40 percent of Medicare funding, which pays for physician services, comes from general revenues and a monthly premium paid by the elderly.) The basis for the claim that Medicare is "going bankrupt" is the projection that revenue from the 2.9 percent payroll tax will drop below Medicare hospital expenditures in 2008, just two years before the leading edge of the Baby Boom turns 65. The projections are accurate. It's the "bankruptcy" rhetoric that's deceptive. If Medicare were funded by general revenues, as most government programs are, it would be more difficult for privatizers to argue that bankruptcy is the inevitable result of forces beyond congressional control. Can you imagine anyone arguing that the Pentagon is "going bankrupt"? Of course not. The Pentagon will "go bank-

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rupt" only if Congress wants it to. The same is true of Medicare. Medicare will expire only if a Republican-controlled Congress says it should.

Republicans have never made their peace with Medicare, a popular program that covers 15 percent of the U.S. population and pays 20 percent of the U.S. health care bill. When Congress enacted Medicare in 1965, a majority of Republicans in Congress voted against it. Today, few Republicans are willing to call for the elimination of Medicare. (Newt Gingrich was an exception. In a speech to Blue Cross Blue Shield executives, he recommended letting Medicare "wither on the vine.") But most Republicans do want to reduce the government's share of health care expenditures for Medicare beneficiaries, and they want private insurance companies to have much more control over Medicare. They know the only way to get Americans to support the privatization of Medicare is to convince us that our choice is between a privatized Medicare and no Medicare at all. Hence the "bankruptcy" rhetoric.

Stealth Plan

Unlike those who seek to privatize Social Security, those who seek to privatize Medicare rarely use the word "privatize," and they do not propose privatization overnight. They propose, rather, changes to Medicare that would render Medicare vulnerable to a gradual takeover by health insurance companies. The privatizers propose to take from seniors Medicare's guarantee of medical services, and to replace that guarantee with a voucher—a set amount of money that seniors could use to buy health insurance, either from traditional Medicare or from HMOs or other types of health insurance companies.

It was this voucher proposal that 10 members of the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare endorsed on January 6. Although voucher proponents have not said in so many words that they expect vouchers to force seniors to join HMOs, their high praise for HMOs and other insurance companies that use HMO cost-control tactics indicates that they expect vouchers to have that effect.

On the surface, the voucher proposal seems harmless. Seniors will not be compelled to leave Medicare if they do not want to. If the traditional Medicare program is indeed more efficient than private-sector insurers, then Medicare will offer a more attractive benefit package than the private insurers will, seniors will award their voucher to Medicare, and nothing will change. Or so goes the argument.

But this argument ignores the risk that the voucher experiment will be rigged in the private sector's favor by giving health insurance companies subsidies—subsidies that permit insurance companies to offer lower premiums and/or better coverage than Medicare can. This advantage for the private sector may be further aggravated by setting the value of the vouchers just high enough to cover the cost of buying a (subsidized) private plan, but not high enough to cover the cost of remaining in Medicare. If the difference between the voucher and the cost of staying in Medicare is even a few hundred dollars, a large proportion of seniors would feel irresistable financial pressure to abandon Medicare in favor of the private sector.

How, you may ask, could the insurance industry possibly persuade Congress to fork over subsidies? Wouldn't a request for subsidies destroy the industry's claim that they are more efficient than traditional Medicare? To see how this trick might be accomplished, we need look no further than Medicare's experience with HMOs.

From 1972 until 1998, HMOs were the only type of health insurance company allowed to serve Medicare beneficiaries. But until 1985, very few seniors enrolled in HMOs. That changed in 1985 when the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA, the agency that administers Medicare) altered the way it reimburses Medicare HMOs. Since 1985, HMOs have been overpaid by HCFA; HMOs have used their subsidies to offer coverage for drugs, hearing aids and other goods and services not covered by Medicare; and, as a consequence, enrollment in Medicare HMOs has soared. Today 17 percent of Medicare eligibles are enrolled in HMOs. Research indicates that seniors did not enroll in HMOs because they enjoy having their choice of doctor limited or because HMOs are known to offer superior or even equivalent health care. Seniors enrolled to get better coverage.

HCFA did not deliberately set the HMO reimbursement rate too high. On the basis of little more than HMO assertions that they were more efficient than Medicare, HCFA set the HMO reimbursement rate 5 percent below the rate at which HCFA reimburses doctors and hospitals in the traditional, fee-for-service Medicare program. But HCFA failed to anticipate that the seniors who would sign up with HMOs would be primarily healthy seniors, and that sicker seniors would refuse to leave classic Medicare. This problem, called "biased selection," is due only in part to the advertising tactics of HMOs (you rarely see someone in a wheelchair in an HMO ad). The more important cause of biased selection in favor of HMOs is the greater reluctance of sicker seniors, as com-

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pared to healthier seniors, to give up their freedom to choose their doctors and to run the risk of being denied care. Research on biased selection suggests that Medicare should have set its HMO reimbursement rate as low as 55 percent of the rate it paid fee-for-service doctors (see sidebar), not 95 percent.

HCFA also failed to anticipate that HMOs would be more aggressive at denying health care than doctors paid under Medicare's fee-for-service reimbursement system. A rapidly growing body of evidence indicates that HMO enrollees cost less than Medicare enrollees not just because the former are healthier, but because HMOs deny necessary medical services more frequently than Medicare does. A 1994 study of Medicare patients published in *Health Care Financing Review* reported that traditional Medicare patients received 18.8 home health care visits during the first 60 days after leaving the hospital compared to 12.7 for HMO patients, and that traditional Medicare patients recovered their health more quickly. A 1996 survey of Medicare beneficiaries conducted for the Physician Payment Review Commission (a congressional advisory committee) found that Medicare eligibles enrolled in HMOs were three times as likely as those in traditional Medicare to report problems getting medical care. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1996 found that elderly patients were *twice* as likely to suffer deterioration in their health over a *four-year* period (not a decade or a lifetime) if they were enrolled in HMOs than if they were enrolled in traditional fee-for-service health insurance plans. Studies published in *JAMA* in the summer of

Corporate Welfare For HMOs: The Evidence

Since the establishment of Medicare in 1965, the great majority of Medicare beneficiaries have been treated by doctors who were paid a fee for each service they rendered. This reimbursement method is called "fee-for-service," and is to be distinguished from the two other common methods of paying doctors—salary and capitation. Capitation refers to a method of paying a doctor a set fee per patient per year.

Between 1985 and 1998, HCFA's reimbursement rate for HMOs was set at 95 percent of the cost of serving an enrollee in Medicare's fee-for-service (FFS) sector. The rate will fall gradually to 92.2 percent by 2002. In setting these rates, HCFA failed to account adequately for the fact that seniors who elect to enroll in an HMO are much healthier than those who choose to stay in traditional FFS Medicare. The tendency of an insurance company, or an entire category of insurers such as HMOs, to attract healthier enrollees is called "favorable" or "biased" selection. Scientific research consistently indicates that Medicare HMOs are the beneficiaries of biased selection.

This research consists of more than a dozen studies done over the last decade. The 1996 report of the Physician Payment Review Commission (an advisory body to Congress) listed twelve such studies. Some of the differences in health status were enormous. The most recent of these studies found that, in the six months prior to signing up with HMOs, spending on those Medicare beneficiaries who signed up with an HMO was only 63 percent of those who chose to enroll in FFS Medicare.

In July 1997, the *New England Journal of Medicine* published a study comparing hospital utilization rates among HMO and FFS Medicare enrollees in the year before the HMO enrollees left FFS Medicare to join an HMO, and in the three months after some of the HMO enrollees disenrolled and returned to FFS Medicare. The study found that HMO enrollee hospital costs were only 55 percent of the cost of FFS enrollees in the year prior to joining an HMO ($693 versus $1,260 per beneficiary), and that the HMO enrollees who disenrolled and returned to FFS Medicare incurred hospital costs that were double the costs incurred by FFS enrollees ($644 versus $322 per beneficiary) in the first three months after enrollment. The study was entitled, appropriately, "The Medicare-HMO Revolving Door—The Healthy Go In and the Sick Go Out."

These figures suggest that HCFA should be paying HMOs as little as 55 percent of the FFS rate. But HCFA paid 95 percent of the FFS rate between 1985 and 1998, and is currently paying 93.7 percent. Is it any wonder that HMOs can afford to attract healthier enrollees with coverage that is richer than traditional Medicare's?

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1997 indicated that HMOs perform far fewer cataract operations and provide fewer stroke rehabilitation services to Medicare beneficiaries. On the basis of studies like these, plus an ocean of anecdotal evidence, the October 1996 edition of *Consumer Reports* urged the nation's Medicare eligibles not to enroll in HMOs "unless money is a very big consideration."

In short, Medicare's experience with HMOs demonstrates how easy it is for HMOs to extract subsidies from HCFA without asking for them—without coming right out and saying, "We're so unattractive that seniors won't join us unless we offer better coverage than traditional Medicare, and, because we're not more efficient than Medicare, we cannot finance the extra coverage unless the taxpayer subsidizes us."

The HMO Shell Game

At this point you might be thinking that the HMO subsidy's days are numbered now that the existence of the subsidy is known. You might be thinking that all these studies documenting biased selection, HMO rationing, and overpayments by Medicare will soon provoke Congress to eliminate the subsidy. If you're thinking that, you're wrong. Although some of the studies documenting the HMO subsidy received extensive publicity when they were released, the subsidy has never been eliminated. Congress did get brave in 1997 and ordered a cut of 2.8 percentage points to be phased in over five years. Beginning in 2002, the average Medicare HMO will be paid 92.2 percent of the average fee-for-service rate.

The HMO industry was not amused. It has just undertaken a national campaign to increase the subsidy. The campaign began last year with a wave of announcements by HMOs that they could no longer afford to offer better coverage to seniors and would be pulling out of the Medicare market. Between the spring and fall of 1998, 43 of the 347 HMOs that served Medicare beneficiaries told HCFA they would not renew their Medicare contracts, and another 54 announced plans to reduce the geographic areas they would serve. On January 1, 1999, over 400,000 Medicare beneficiaries in 29 states and the District of Columbia lost their HMO coverage. Of these, 50,000 have no choice but to return to traditional Medicare and either go without the coverage of drugs and other services they once had, or buy supplemental insurance at a premium far above the premium they paid to their HMO.

The HMOs want the public to believe that HCFA is the villain in this farce. For example, when United HealthCare, the nation's second-largest health insurance company, announced last October that it was abandoning 59,000 Medicare beneficiaries in 12 states, United's chief medical officer explained, "The revenue from HCFA was not high enough..." The news media has obediently passed this rationale on to the public without reminding us of the HMO subsidy. Nor are we being told that doctors in Medicare's fee-for-service sector, who are not getting a handsome subsidy, are continuing to see Medicare patients all over the country including the regions from which Medicare HMOs have pulled out. Only the bloated, heavily subsidized HMOs are taking their marbles and going home.

In a rational world, the existence of the HMO subsidy, and the abandonment of the Medicare market by so many HMOs, would be interpreted as evidence that Medicare's experiment with HMOs has failed—that HMOs are too inefficient to provide health care to the elderly and the disabled and should be ejected from the Medicare program. As Diane Archer of the Medicare Rights Center put it to *The New York Times* last August, "People seem to forget that Medicare was created because private insurers could not make money on the elderly population." But despite the evidence that HMOs enroll healthier seniors and ration aggressively, and despite evidence that HMOs are incapable of attracting seniors and making money off of them without large subsidies, there is no movement in Congress to kick HMOs out of Medicare. It is more likely that Congress will increase the subsidy, at least for those HMOs that have announced they are bailing out.

The unwillingness of Congress to eliminate the HMO subsidy even after the subsidy has been documented suggests that any experiment with Medicare vouchers will be rigged. In such an experiment, the advantage to the private sector conferred by subsidies may be further enhanced by miserly voucher levels. An example will illustrate. Let us say that Medicare, which now spends about $5,500 per beneficiary, set the voucher level at $5,000 per beneficiary. Let us also say that the private sector, enjoying the advantages of biased selection and/or invisible rationing, can afford to set its premiums at $5,000 whereas traditional Medicare must continue to charge $5,500. Now all but wealthy seniors will have a strong incentive to leave Medicare and enroll with a health insurance company. Sicker seniors who want to stay in traditional Medicare will have to come up with an additional $500 payment.

If the voucher experiment is rigged well enough, that is, if biased selection and rationing permit health insurance companies to create a large gap between

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their premiums and Medicare's, and if the voucher is not sufficient to cover Medicare's premium, all but the wealthy sick will abandon Medicare. Privatization will have been achieved even though the word "privatization" may never have escaped the lips of its proponents. Proponents will assert that privatization occurred through the "free choice" of millions of seniors "voting with their feet."

What is most galling about the recent debate about Medicare—the "bankruptcy" rhetoric, the lionization of health insurance companies, and the call to substitute vouchers for guaranteed medical services—is the failure of Medicare's defenders and the media to counter the attack on Medicare by Republicans and conservative Democrats. There is nothing wrong with Medicare's basic cost containment methods, certainly nothing so wrong as to warrant the herding of millions of enrollees into inefficient health insurance companies, many of which rely on rationing to control spending. Republican and insurance industry propaganda not withstanding, Medicare has been more successful at keeping its costs down than private-sector insurers have. According to a study by the Urban Institute, the growth rate of Medicare's per capita costs between 1984 and 1993 was below that of the private sector for eight out of those 10 years. In the November/December 1998 edition of the journal *Health Affairs*, HCFA reported that Medicare's spending per enrollee grew at a slower rate between 1969 and 1997 than the private sector's (10.4 percent annually versus 11.4 percent, respectively). This track record would have been even better if Medicare had not been overpaying doctors, hospitals and HMOs. A recent federal investigation reported that Medicare is overpaying its traditional (fee-for-service) Medicare providers by about 14 percent, due in part to fraud by providers and incompetence on the part of the private-sector insurers that handle claims for Medicare. As I reported above, Medicare is also overpaying HMOs.

Medicare is more effective at controlling health care costs than the private sector is, and Medicare has achieved this level of efficiency without resorting to the private sector's favorite cost-control technique—denying necessary services to patients.

Medicare has been able to beat the private sector at cost containment because Medicare has very low overhead costs (Medicare spends a mere 2 percent of its revenues on overhead versus at least 13 to 15 percent for private-sector insurers), and because Medicare reimburses doctors and hospitals at rates below those paid by private-sector insurers. Medicare's overhead is much lower than the private sector's because it does not pay for marketing, utilization review (jargon for unsolicited insurance company advice to doctors about how to take care of patients), obscene salaries, and myriad costs associated with influencing public policy. Moreover, Medicare does not have to make a profit for stockholders.

Yet it's also important to note the cost-control techniques Medicare does *not* use. Traditional Medicare does not use the techniques so beloved by the private sector that now threaten quality of care—restricting the freedom to choose one's doctor, overturning physician-patient decisions, and exposing doctors to financial incentives to deny care.

The real problem with Medicare is not that it is inefficient but that it relies so heavily on regressive taxes. Medicare's method of financing *hospital* services—payroll taxes on working people—is regressive and increasingly insufficient as the ratio of retirees to workers rises. The problem with Medicare's method of financing *physician* services is that a fourth of the financing comes from monthly premiums paid by Medicare enrollees. These premiums are even more regressive than the payroll tax. The upcoming Medicare debate should include a discussion about whether to abandon payroll taxes and premiums in favor of a progressive, general tax.

However, a debate about the fairness of Medicare financing is unlikely in the near term. Judging from the lack of interest in this question shown by the National Bipartisan Commission on the Future of Medicare, it is a good bet that the fairness of Medicare taxes will not be a part of the upcoming debate. It appears, rather, that we will debate vouchers, or, in the lingo of the privatizers on the commission, "premium support." We will debate vouchers despite the evidence that Medicare provides higher quality health

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care to our elderly and disabled at a lower cost than the nation's insurance industry, and despite the crying need for a debate about whether Medicare should continue to rely on regressive taxes. We will debate vouchers because Republicans and their allies in the insurance industry have managed to fool a substantial portion of the nation's opinion-making elite into thinking that Medicare's problem is a cost-containment problem as opposed to a choice-of-financing problem, and that this problem can be ameliorated if health insurance companies are allowed to guard the Medicare chicken coop.

If the privatizers succeed in fooling a majority in Congress, and if the Medicare voucher experiment is rigged, Medicare will gradually be transformed from the most efficient insurance program in the country into a mere funnel of tax money into insurance company coffers. Classic Medicare will have been starved down to a small program for the very sick or killed off entirely. Those who committed this crime will deny their complicity. They will point their finger at all those seniors who "voted with their feet." ○

The Washington Monthly

Journalism Award

DECEMBER 1998

JASON DEPARLE

"Welfare was Here: Giuliani's Welfare Jihad and the Fate of New York's Poor"

The New York Times Magazine

New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani has cut 400,000 people from New York's welfare rolls since he announced his intention to "end welfare by the end of this century completely" in 1993. But what has become of those people, and how is the mayor dealing with the more difficult cases that remain on the rolls? In a masterful blend of reporting and analysis, DeParle grapples with these questions, highlighting Giuliani's successes and failures and explaining what lies behind both.

JANUARY 1999

BARBARA EHRENREICH

"Nickel-and-Dimed: On (not) getting by in America"

Harpers Magazine

In order to look into the feasibility of making the transition from welfare-to-work, Ehrenreich went undercover as a divorced former housekeeper and began waiting tables. Her eyewittness account is sobering. Lacking health insurance, her co-workers suffer catastrophe when illness strikes. Unable to afford decent housing, they live in their cars. By pulling us into the world of the working poor, she makes us contemplate the what it means to live hand-to-mouth, with little hope of advancement.

STEVE BRADSHAW, MIKE ROBINSON, AND BEN LOETERMAN

"The Triumph of Evil"

FRONTLINE

Although it fails to fully acknowledge the guilt of the Tutsis in previous slaughter, this remains a devastating indictment of Hutu's nearly successful attempt at genocide five years ago in Rwanda—and more importantly—the failure of the United Nations and the United States to act before it was too late.

THE MONTHLY JOURNALISM AWARD is presented each month to one or more newspaper, magazine, radio, or television stories (or series of stories) that demonstrate a commitment to the public interest. We are particularly interested in reporting that explains the successes and failures of government agencies at all levels and of other institutions such as the media, corporations, unions, and foundations that contribute to the existence or solution of public problems. Please send nominations (including two copies of the article or broadcast tape) to The Washington Monthly Journalism Award, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20009. Or e-mail us at editors@washingtonmonthly.com. Nominations for stories run in February are due March 5.

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Advertisement

TO DEFEND CLINTON
OBLIQUELY

IN THE UNITED STATES, 50 million children are afflicted with a sickness for which our medieval society has no name:

INTELLECTUAL POVERTY
30 million of these live in economic poverty. A third of the nation is still ill-fed, ill-housed, ill-educated, and ill-doctored.

(Is Monica so important?)

THE AVERAGE AMERICAN studies the lineup of the Yankees, but is not able to name even one of the justices of the Supreme Court. No, Tony Scalia is not a shortstop for the Cardinals. Under such circumstances, democracy is clearly an impossibility.

A NATION whose fastest growing industries are:

GAMBLING
PRISON CONSTRUCTION

(Let us discuss Monica!)

A DRUG EPIDEMIC out of control with a know-nothing government completely at a loss - no ideas - no solutions.

A DEVASTATING AIDS PANDEMIC, which could have readily been contained but for a leadership so incredibly ignorant of the basic elements of viral epidemiology.

(More Monica?)

MOUNTAINS OF NUCLEAR WASTE, which will plague our planet for the next 500,000 years, with no adequate facilities for long term storage.

A CORPULENT MILITARY with a life of its own, wasteful and insatiable, draining our resources with human misery, its only end product. The violent slaughter of 164 million humans in the 20th century has taught us ZERO.

(Congress is obsessed with Monica!)

A RUSSIA IN CHAOS with 10,000 nuclear missiles—sufficient to destroy every American city.

(More Monica!)

...America, that was wont to conquer others,
hath made shameful conquest of itself...

~NICHOLAS STEPHEN POLUHOFF

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Campaign Reform: A Way Forward

Close the loopholes, provide free air time, and fire the consultants

BY PAUL TAYLOR

THROUGHOUT THE IMPEACHMENT debate this winter, members of Congress kept paying homage to the "sanctity" and the "solemnity" of elections. As an affirmation of constitutional scripture, their words were apt. As an argument against removing a president, they were powerful. But as a portrait of modern politics, they were hooey.

Elections have lost their pride of place at the center of our democratic life. They are bloated with money, stale with ads, devoid of citizens and impervious to change. No one knows this better—or profits from it more—than members of Congress.

Consider the 1998 mid-term elections. They set all sorts of the wrong kind of records, among them:

A record for non-competitiveness. Of the 401 members of the House who sought reelection last fall, a record 98.3 percent won. They outspent their challengers by an average ratio of five to one, and they piled up an average victory margin of 43 percentage points. Nearly a quarter (23.6 percent) did not have any major party opponent on the general election ballot. In the party primaries, only one member of Congress failed to win renomination—Rep. Jay Kim (R-Calif.)—and he was unable to campaign. A judge had confined him to home detention and put him in an ankle bracelet, his penalty for conviction on a charge of accepting an illegal campaign contribution.

A record for non-participation. Some 115.5 million adults, or 64 percent of the eligible electorate, stayed away from the polling booths last Nov. 3. In absolute numbers, this constituted the largest electoral boycott in history. In percentage terms, it was the smallest turnout since 1942, when lots of would-be voters were busy overseas saving the world.

A record for non-coverage. The major network television news programs carried 73 percent fewer stories about the 1998 midterm elections than they did about the 1994 midterm, according to the Center for Media and Public Affairs. And in California, ground zero for television's virtual blackout of electoral politics, local stations devoted less than one third of one percent of their news coverage last fall to the open seat governor's race, according to the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. "Those who believe that political coverage basically doesn't exist on local TV news turn out to be right," said Annenberg Associate Dean Martin Kaplan.

A record for political advertising volume. The stations did run ads, ads and more ads, however, in California and all over the country. The Television Bureau of Advertising tallied up $531 million in station revenue from political spots in 1998, the biggest election year haul ever. The money paid for thousands of ads that aired a million-plus times. Quickie quiz: Can you remember even one?

A record for campaign spending. Scholars estimate that the aggregate political spending in the 1997-98 election cycle by candidates, parties, and interest groups was about $4 billion, by far the most ever in a non-presidential campaign year. How was the money raised? Brian Baird, a candidate in an open seat race in Washington's 3rd Congressional District, agreed to let a researcher from American University track his campaign day, minute by minute. In September and October, Baird spent an average of four hours a day, seven days a week, in a rented room in Olympia mak-

PAUL TAYLOR, *a former* Washington Post *reporter, is executive director of The Alliance for Better Campaigns.*

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ing cold fundraising calls. He spent one hour a day talking to voters. He won.

If all these records were part of the annual report of a business enterprise, the executive summary would read: spending more to attract fewer customers. That business would be staring at bankruptcy or restructuring. Campaigns face no such market discipline. They are more akin to a state-sanctioned monopoly. Consumer boycotts do not faze the monopolists (i.e., the incumbents) who set the rules of the game. They need worry only about market share, not market size. Rising costs do not faze the monopolists. They simply create new campaign finance loopholes through which to extract more contributions from the monied interests eager to stay in their good graces. Best of all, low-turnout, high-cost campaigns raise barriers to entry for non-incumbents, satisfying the monopolist's first rule of self-preservation: eliminate competition before it materializes.

The public understands these dynamics, but registers disapproval by withdrawing from the game rather than by agitating for change —thereby rewarding the monopolists and perpetuating the cycle. This drop-out instinct wasn't always so powerful; for much of the 19th Century our presidential election turnout rates hovered around 75 percent. That was the era of the torchlight parade and the party machine. Politics was more raw then, and more corrupt, but also more participatory. What's changed is the way political information is conveyed. Now, citizens learn about candidates from television; then, they learned about candidates from partisan loyalists, neighbors, rallies, the printed word. The older forms gave citizens a sense that they had a stake in the outcome of campaigns. Television gives citizens a sense that politics is merely an entertainment, to be consumed the way the television's talking heads present it—with a smirk and a swagger.

The disconnect between politics and people is especially daunting at the moment—driven from one quarter by "hum of our prosperity" and from another by the din of Monicagate. One has made the public content, the other contemptuous. Both have sent it streaming for the exits from the public square. It may well be that nothing short of a national crisis will reverse the migration. But it may also be that the whole overstuffed, under-populated enterprise of politics is poised to collapse of is own weight—to be replaced by something smarter, cleaner, cheaper, better. Even in the barren landscape of the 1998 election, there were some tantalizing hints that such a day may come sooner rather than later. To hasten it along, what follows are a couple of rules of the road toward political reform. They are offered not as panaceas or guarantees—for none exist—but as hopes and aspirations.

1. Campaign finance reform is but a small piece of a much larger challenge. Don't oversell it, but don't stop pushing for incremental change, for it's within reach.

For two decades, the reform community has taken it as an article of faith that the campaign finance system was one big scandal away from a big fix. The 1996 presidential campaign supplied the scandal—a rash of soft money abuses that drove a gaping loophole through the Watergate-era reform that provides full public funding to presidential candidates who agree to take no private money for their general election campaigns. Right on schedule, the scandals generated weeks of headlines, then months of Congressional hearings, then multiple Justice Department and Federal Election Commission investigations, then ... nothing. There was little outcry from the public and less response from the government. A bill to shut down soft money—the unlimited contributions to political parties by corporations, unions, groups or individuals—did pass the House of Representatives in the summer of 1998, but as expected it ran aground in the Senate, where it remains a stubborn eight votes shy of the 60 needed to overcome a Republican filibuster. Late last year the Justice Department closed down its soft money investigations. Around the same time, the staff of the FEC recommended that the Clinton and Dole campaigns be required to repay millions of dollars in public funds they received in 1996 as a penalty for improperly using party soft money issue ads to promote their candida-

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cies. But the FEC rejected its staff recommendation on a 6-0 vote, essentially agreeing with the Justice Department that these rules were too vague to enforce. These two non-enforcement decisions mean that in the 2000 campaign, soft money will be able to flow unrestrained to support presidential candidates. Fred Wertheimer, president of Democracy 21, says that this has thrown the state of campaign finance law backward not just a generation to the Watergate Era but a century to the Robber Baron Era.

The soft money and issue ad loopholes have transformed the way campaigns are waged. Candidates are no longer the sole communicators in their own campaigns. They now share the electoral microphone with a cacophony of other voices—groups, parties, individuals—that run their own campaign ads. The courts are highly protective of the free speech rights of these groups. As long as their ads don't use words such as "vote for" or "vote against," the courts have ruled they are issue ads rather than campaign ads, and therefore not subject to campaign finance regulation. But in reality, most of these issue ads "look more like campaign ads than campaign ads do," says former FEC Chairman Trevor Potter. The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania did a content analysis of the ads that ran in the fall of 1998, and found that issue ads sponsored by parties and groups were twice as likely as candidate ads to attack a political candidate. Annenberg also found that issue ads are the fastest growing form of campaign communication. In the 1996 election, it catalogued some 30 groups that spent an estimated $135 to $150 million on such ads: By 1998, it counted more than 75 groups that had spent up to $330 million. This shift away from candidate-centered campaigns has created "an increasingly unrestrained system that is out of control in terms of accountability," says Brigham Young University political scientist David B. Magleby, who found that in several of the competitive Senate and House races in 1998, aggregate spending by parties and issue groups exceeded aggregate spending by the candidates.

This creates a Catch-22 for campaign finance reformers. The more they try to clamp down on how much candidates can spend, the more they will divert campaign money and message to entities that voters cannot hold accountable on election day. In the past two years, most reformers have faced up to this dilemma and shifted the focus of their legislative energies away from the spending limits approach that had constituted the paradigm for reform for two decades. The leading bipartisan campaign finance measures in the last Congress—McCain-Feingold in the Senate and Shays-Meehan in the House—each started out as spending limits bills, but each had dropped that key provision by the time they went to the floor. Instead, they focus on curbing party soft money and bringing sham issue ads under a regime of disclosure and contribution limits. To win Republican support, such a bipartisan package will probably have to include an increase in the $1,000 per person per election contribution limit to federal candidates—a ceiling that has been lowered by inflation by roughly two-thirds since it was enacted about 25 years ago. These bills will not end the campaign spending arms race or drive special interest money out of politics—goals that are popular but unachievable, given the courts' protection of political spending as political speech. They are more in the nature of a periodic clean-up of the worst abuses in the current system. They are worthwhile, they pass constitutional muster and they stand a good chance of passing Congress. That probably won't happen in the current session, given the distractions of impeachment and presidential politicking. It could well happen after the 2000 election. But if and when it does happen, these campaign finance fixes will not substantially change the dynamics of modern campaigns. They will not open up the system to outsiders. They will not reduce the advantages of incumbency. They will not reconnect people to politics.

2. For more fundamental reform, look to changes in the culture of politics rather than changes in the laws.

Samuel Goldwyn is said to have quipped after a box office disappointment: "If people don't want to see one of my movies, there's nothing in the world I can do to stop them." The show people don't want to see these days is the show called politics. Who can blame them? It's become a stale production of cookie cutter ads, scripted sound bites and gas bag punditry. But it doesn't have to stay that way. The great anomaly about our current disconnect from politics is that, even as they drift way in boredom, frustration or contempt, people know that politics still matters to all the things they care about—jobs, schools, health care, retirement. And journalists have always known that campaigns can have the ingredients of great theater—suspense, personality, plot line, drama, high stakes, big ending. The trouble is the show. It needs to be reinvented.

The place to start is by going into the belly of the beast—television—and converting it to a medium that allows candidates to talk about issues and tell their story in a way that engages and informs. In other words, to break the grip that attack ads and sound bites have on political discourse. This won't be easy. Most television station managers consider politics to

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be ratings death. Many candidates (especially incumbents) consider television too important to be left to anything but their 30-second spots. Both are well-served by a status quo that delivers handsome election year profits to broadcasters and lopsided winning percentages to incumbents. They've joined forces over the years to kill all attempts to require that stations provide free air time to candidates and parties. But there's a new proposal on the table that may offer a way around this logjam. A presidential advisory panel known as the Gore Commission issued a report last December that calls on stations to voluntarily provide five minutes a night of "candidate-centered discourse" on the 30 nights preceding all elections.

Five minutes a night might not sound like much, but if each of the nation's 1,600 television stations acted on this recommendation, they could transform campaigns. To start with, they'd force themselves to invent new formats for political discourse that don't cost ratings. Local television has managed to turn the weather report into a heavily-watched five-minute saga every night. Why not the same for politics? How about live mini-debates, in which candidates spar over taxes one night and education the next. Or newsmagazine-style interviews, in which candidates can talk about who they are and where they come from. Or a series of issue statements, in which candidates can present their policy views at more depth than a sound bite. Let a thousand flowers bloom. Create venues where candidates can speak in something other than candidate-speak, because the viewers have already heard all the spin, and it doesn't interest them. If these segments were to become a routine feature of the nightly news, they would be harder for front-running candidates to duck. The model here is the presidential debates. Nobody passed a law to require that candidates take part. It simply became a normal expectation—one that carries political penalties if ignored. If these shorter segments became institutionalized in the same way, it would open up politics to challengers who cannot now compete in campaigns driven exclusively by money and ads. That would mean more choices for citizens and better stories for journalists. And that would reverse the cycle of blowouts, blackouts and boycotts that reached such suffocating dimensions in 1998.

Will the broadcasters step up to the challenge? Seven of the Gore Commission's 22 members were from the industry, and the panel was co-chaired by CBS Television President Leslie Moonves. He promises that CBS will do its part, and some other station groups are likely to do so as well. They find themselves in the uncomfortable position of profiting from a political system that just about everyone considers bankrupt, by running ads that just about everyone considers poisonous. If nothing else, this is bad for television's corporate image and community relations. They also know that their industry's abandonment of political coverage at the state and local level is a journalistic disgrace. On the other hand, the National Association of Broadcasters plays by the never-give-an-inch rules of trade association politics; they can be counted on to fight all standards, even voluntary ones. President Clinton, Vice President Gore and FCC Chairman William Kennard—ardent proponents of free candidate air time—ought to do some heavy jawboning on this issue. American commercial broadcasters are virtually alone in the world in not being required to provide free air time to candidates during election campaigns. The federal government has granted them licenses worth billions of dollars—free of charge—in return for a commitment to serve the public interest. If the broadcasters can't figure out that this modest, voluntary, five-minute fix is in the public interest, somebody needs to tell them.

There are other places to look for fixes. One is the internet. As usage explodes, the internet opens up vast opportunities for political discourse, though the challenge will be to get high quality information not just to those who are motivated to look for it, but to those who aren't. Another is inside the political industry, especially its ad makers. They have become emperors with no clothes, and people have begun to notice. Last June, after businessman Al Checchi reached into his own pockets for a record $40 million and came away with a mere 13 percent of the vote in the California gubernatorial primary, San Francisco ad executive Bob Gardner offered this post-mortem on the race: "The headline should have been: 'Political consultants doing crummy, tired, pedestrian, formula ads take down naive billionaire candidate while making enough money to retire to Tahiti.'" The dirty little secret is beginning to get out: political ads don't work nearly as well as they once did. The consultants acknowledge as much—lamenting that in the old days, they could put 500 gross rating points behind an ad to assure it had an impact, while now they need to buy 1,500 or 2,000 points. They blame this on audience fragmentation and the channel clicker. The bigger problem may be their ads. "They are still trying to annoy people into buying their product," says Bill Hillsman, the Minnesota ad man who did Jesse Ventura's campaign commercials. "It's as if they are still running ring-around-the-collar spots from the 1970s. The culture has moved on. The political consultants haven't." Candidates and donors ought to start demanding better value.

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Ventura's surprise win in the Minnesota governor's race last year provided another hint that change may be in the air, as did organized labor's old-fashioned get-out-the-vote efforts in Nevada, Wisconsin and other closely contested senate races in 1998. The key to the Ventura victory was that he was included in all six televised debates. He used them to talk about issues in a refreshingly candid way; his two major-party opponents stuck to sound bites and candidate-speak. The key to labor's success was its decision to shift resources from the air war to a ground war. In Nevada, shop stewards visited 40,000 union members in their homes last fall. The

Who's Who

By Susan Threadgill

Did you know that **Monica Lewinsky** and her pals used code names? She and **Betty Currie** used the name "Kay" when leaving pager messages for each other. **Linda Tripp**'s code name for Lewinsky was "Mary." **Michael Isikoff** was "Harvey" to Linda Tripp and "Spikey" to her literary agent **Lucianne Goldberg**, according to **Alicia Shepard**'s profile of Isikoff in last December's issue of *American Journalism Review*.

What's **George Stephanopoulos** going to reveal in his forthcoming book? We got a hint in Little, Brown's spring '99 catalogue: "George clung to the vision of what a **Clinton** presidency could be, even as he began to see the hidden, dark compartments in the man." And guess "whose combative instincts were, sadly, behind many of her husband's missteps"?

Alexander Butterfield, who Watergate aficionados will recall as the man who blew the whistle on **Richard Nixon**'s taping system, recently revealed another White House secret. The 50,000 telegrams and 30,000 letters that seemed to represent overwhelming public support of Nixon's "silent majority" speech in 1969 were in fact the product of a campaign Butterfield, then a White House staffer, had helped arrange. He solicited what the Associated Press describes as "accolades to be sent after the speech by members of labor unions, the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, and by Air Force retirees, governors, and state Republican chairmen."

Sen. **John Breaux**, the president of the Alfalfa Club, a once-a-year Washington gathering of really big biggies, told this story to the group's most recent conclave in January: "The pope asked **Clinton** to help him out and say something positive about religion. So Clinton went out, had a press conference, and endorsed the Nine Commandments."

Sen. **John McCain** is back again this year with his bill to add more flights to Washington's overcrowded Reagan National Airport including—cynics suspect this is the legislation's main purpose—twenty-four that could go beyond the 1,250 mile limit that now prevents the senator from catching a non-stop flight to Arizona from National, which is only 15 minutes from his Senate office. We can't help wondering if this means that the senator is not entirely confident that he will be flying home on Air Force One which is housed at Andrews Air Force Base, only five minutes by helicopter from the White House lawn.

If conservatives control the Republican nomination, McCain is wise not to count on having Air Force One at his disposal. His name does not even appear in a news report about the potential presidential candidates who attracted votes in a straw poll taken at the 26th annual Conservative Political Action Conference. According to *The Washington Times*, **Gary Bauer** led with 28 percent, followed by **George W. Bush** with 24 percent, and **Steve Forbes** with 10 percent.

It turns out that **Tom DeLay**, who may well be **Bill Clinton**'s-tormentor-in-chief, is not above giving a little misleading testimony himself. In July 1994, he testified under oath that he had not been the chairman of the board of the Albo Pest Control company. But House documents filed by DeLay show he was chairman in 1991, 1992, and 1993. In a similar vein, a "60 Minutes" broadcast on Feb. 7th embarrased **Ken Starr** by showing he had justified perjury and obstruction of justice when they were committed by his client, General Motors.

If you're a mite surprised that

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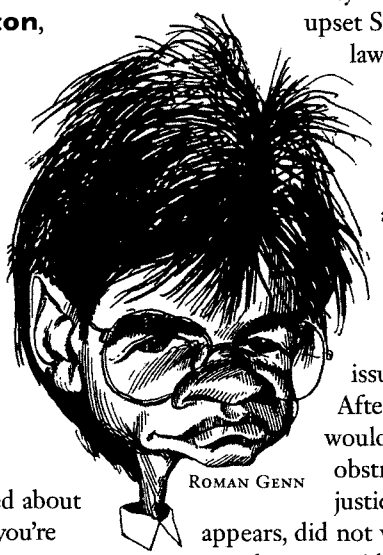
labor portion of the electorate nearly doubled from two years before, enabling Sen. Harry Reid (D-Nev.) to eke out a razor thin victory. "I think the parties are missing the boat here," says AFL-CIO political director Steve Rosenthal. "Our members tell us they like it when someone comes out to talk to them about politics."

This is hardly radical stuff, but it was just a glimmer in 1998. It seems strange only in a political culture in which campaigning means that a candidate is lashed to a telephone, dialing for dollars to pay for television commercials the public has stopped watching. Talk about strange—*that's* strange.

Bauer beat **Bush,** Reuters has an explanation: Bauer's organization offered to pay the $90 registration fee of the social conservative activists who were likely to support him.

If you want a glimpse into the minds of the social conservatives who hate **Bill Clinton**, consider this remark Congressman **Chris Cannon** recently made to the *Salt Lake Tribune* : "The administration has had as a policy goal the public discussion of weird sex. He didn't fire **Jocelyn Elders** until after she said some really weird things and said them many times. She talked about self-abuse. Sex when you're alone."


ROMAN GENN

Students of the Independent Counsel's tactics have wondered why **Ken Starr** backed out of the immunity agreement his staff had negotiated with **Monica Lewinsky** last February, since the testimony she offered then was almost identical to what she later gave in August. According to *The Washington Post's* **Susan Schmidt**, the reason Starr reneged is that Lewinsky had made one last minute change in her testimony about the time **Bill Clinton** told her that if she was asked about why she had been coming to his office she "should say she was bringing him letters... or visiting **Betty Currie**." The change Lewinsky made was to make clear that Clinton said this before she received a subpoena to testify in the **Paula Jones** case. Why did the changes upset Starr? Because, a lawyer friend tells us, there would have been nothing criminal about an attempt to conceal the affair before the subpoena had been issued. Afterwards, it would have been obstruction of justice. Starr, it appears, did not want to hear exculpatory evidence. Doesn't this remind you of the how the Starr report tried to conceal Lewinsky's "No one asked me to lie" statement?

Those who were sure that **Jesse "The Body" Ventura** would fall on his face the minute he entered the governor's mansion turned out to be wrong. He survived his first month in the job with an approval rating of 72 percent, according to a poll conducted by the *Minneapolis-St. Paul Star Tribune* and KMSP-TV. No governor in the polls' 50 year history has received a higher rating.

"With power comes perks," writes **Stephen Green** of Copley News Service, who proceeds to enumerate the goodies coming to **Dennis Hastert** as new Speaker of the House. For starters he gets a $38,700 raise plus a $25,000 entertainment allowance, a limousine and driver, 32 employees of his own, plus the power to name officials with authority over 800 other House staffers. The new leader also acquires "two luxurious suites" in the Capitol Building in addition to his regular congressional offices in the Rayburn Building.

Over the **Clinton** years, we've read a number of stories about the President's engaging friend from his high school days, **Carolyn Staley**. She has remained loyal to Clinton throughout his many troubles—with just one exception. After the August 17 speech, she told *The Wall Street Journal's* **Jeanne Cummings**, she was shaken and even wondered about the president's critics: "Maybe they're right... That was pretty much the bottom." But then what Cumming describes as "the zeal exhibited by Mr. Clinton's opponents" rallied her again to the president's support. We suspect that this was true of many people. The irony of Monicagate may turn out to be that Bill Clinton was saved by his enemies.

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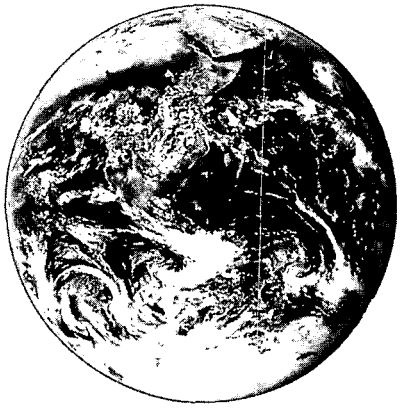

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Memo of the Month

Monday, November 16, 1998 7:32:24 PM
Message

From: [redacted]

Subject: This is no joke, but I thought it would interest you...

To: [redacted]

CALL FOR PAPERS: MARTHA STEWART STUDIES

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This anthology has been accepted for publication. Please send completed work, visual work and CV by January 15, 1999 to BOTH of the following:

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The Epic Years

A magisterial history of the century's defining decades

By John Kenneth Galbraith

FREEDOM FROM FEAR
The American People in Depression and War 1923-1945
The Oxford History of the United States, Vol.9
By David Kennedy
Oxford University Press, $39.95

THIS IS AN ENORMOUS BOOK, HEAVY to carry and light and very agreeable to read. David Kennedy, a professor of history at Stanford, is merciless as to fact and detail but very kind to the reader. It gave me, I do not exaggerate, a very pleasant free-time occupation for a full two weeks.

He begins with Herbert Hoover, for a Stanford professor a local icon, about whom he is at first admiring and then, as the Depression really folded in around, deeply devastating. Next, as expected, comes Roosevelt, by more or less accidental designation the New Deal and the detailed, sometimes brilliant, sometimes chaotic history, economic and political, of the following eight years. After that, the grave and looming threat from abroad. The struggle to help Britain, then Pearl Harbor and the insane declaration by Hitler, while his armies were at terrible winter risk in Russia, of war on the United States.

First comes the account of the war in the Pacific and then in the Mediterranean and in Northern Europe. As an economic political historian and then on the military and war itself, Kennedy holds firmly the attention of the reader, conveying a sense of both serious care and competence, all in good, unassuming English.

The worst thing that can happen to any historian is to have a reviewer who was there. That is, or could be, Kennedy's one misfortune here. I joined the New Deal in the summer of 1934. It was then a year old and I had frequent assignments in Washington thereafter. The first was with the Agricultural Adjustment Administration, then Triple-A, to which Kennedy in an earlier work has given informed attention. As I've often told, being recently from Canada, I was not in those early days an American citizen. As to this I was not asked; I did have to affirm that I was a Democrat, which, of course, I did. Kennedy's account of the AAA accords closely with my own memory. Those with whom I was most associated were concerned with limiting production, cutting back or holding on to the crop and livestock surplus and thus raising prices. He has much more to say of the cruel problems of the small, land-poor families and the sharecroppers than I knew from my own experience. Had my association been with the small assemblage of Communists and fellow-travellers then in Triple-A (including Alger Hiss), my memory would be more complete, although it might have extended less pleasantly to later encounters with Richard Nixon and, needless to say, Sen. Joseph Raymond McCarthy.

These were years of political incoherence, all leading to something better. Perhaps Kennedy dwells a bit too much on the incoherence and not enough on the durable rewards, but the latter, from Social Security, unemployment compensation, protected collective bargaining and the other still-imperfect components of the fair and compassionate state, are all here. Then came the war; as nothing else, it showed by its fiscal effect how depression could be cured.

Kennedy's account of military operations in the Pacific, on which I claim no competence, is literate and interesting. On the home front and in Europe I was present, and I have a reservation about what he says on each.

JOHN KENNETH GALBRAITH *is the Paul M. Warburg Professor of Economics emeritus at Harvard University.*

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My first reservation is predictable. In World War I, prices doubled in a matter of two years. This left the country with a deep and enduring fear that war meant inflation. Of World War II, with a vastly greater drain on the economy, there is no such memory. Prices, especially for farm products, increased modestly; this was extensively seen as a correction of the previous Depression-caused deflation. But general stability was brought about by a stern tax policy emanating from the Treasury, comprehensive rent and price control, and consumer rationing. These are not fully recorded here. As I was the individual primarily in charge of price control (and also of rationing in its earliest stages) with a paid and volunteer staff of thousands, my awareness of this neglect, my thought that Kennedy does not accord our activities full attention, will hardly be surprising. Had there been serious and painful wartime price inflation, those of us who guided or misguided the policy would be much more celebrated, so to speak, in the history of the period. Maybe we should not regret our relative neglect here.

Kennedy also bypasses a problem very evident for all involved in Washington at the time. That was, as many saw it, the dual responsibility of the business tycoon brought to the nation's capital for the war. His task (there were few women), was to mobilize the economy for war; it was also, as many saw it, to protect the system against the continuing threat from Franklin D. Roosevelt. For some the second danger was the greater; for many it meant resisting the government's wartime intrusion on the economy—controlling materials use, shutting down industries that commanded needed materials or labor, other industrial mobilization. These were seen as characteristic Roosevelt interventions in the free enterprise system. Much of the battle that ensued occurred behind closed doors; its intensity has never been fully appreciated. Production increased wonderfully but because of the work of the military procurement authority and the guidance of the economists, not the business talent.

Kennedy's more serious omission, and this was an area in which I was also present and very much involved, concerns the effect of air power on the course of the war. The role of the strategic air force—long-range bombing—was powerfully emphasized in those years. Enormous technological and productive resources were brought to bear; so also money. The best of the young talent went to the bombers. Though casualties could be high, air warfare was thought better than that down on the dirty ground. It was also ineffective.

I directed the study of what were called the "overall effects" of strategic bombing in Germany. I had one of the best groups of professional statisticians and economists ever assembled, full access to all the basic German documents and statistics and to the relevant officials and generals, from Albert Speer on down. Our conclusion: The strategic air attacks did not appreciably reduce German arms production until the last days of the war. Sometimes they provided the remedial motivation, as in the case of aircraft, that actually increased production. The huge air onslaught killed nonparticipants by the thousands and did not appreciably shorten the war. The last deep attacks on Berlin and Dresden were useless and unforgivable. The war was won by ground troops with, of course, tactical air support. The magic of air power nonetheless survived. The way was then open for the most disastrous military misjudgments of our age. Much was expected of air power in Korea; the war was fought out on the ground. Air power could not even protect MacArthur's misguided rush to the Yalu. It was an extravagant and enduring failure in Vietnam; it has not worked against Saddam Hussein; as I write, it is irrelevant once again in Kosovo. Because we have airplanes and all the supporting technology and because, as compared to fighting on the ground, air warfare is, to repeat, clean and hygienic, we hold that it must work. Alas, it doesn't. This lesson began in World War II; Kennedy mentions the limits of air warfare but only in passing. It should have been a major conclusion.

Once again the adverse effect for an author of the reviewer having been there. But the book, nearly all of it, has my strong approval. As it will have, I cannot doubt, that of the many readers it deserves. ○

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Down! Set! Tut! Tut!

Hiking Toward Bethlehem

By Christopher Buckley

"NEVER, EVER REVIEW ONE'S FRIENDS' books," Jonathan Yardley writes of an apparently unhappy episode in his long friendship with the late J. Anthony Lukas. It's probably a good rule, though I do think it is absolutely essential to review one's enemies' books. But I'm going to proceed nonetheless, because I want to say for the record, for whatever it's worth, that this, his most recent collection of his Monday morning *Washington Post* columns establishes him—yet again!—as America's most durable bull detector. Yardley is to cant, pretension, and fatuity as electric bug zappers are to summer moths. Susan Cheever writing yet another book about the ordeal of being John Cheever's daughter? Zzzzzap. Puff of smoke. Maureen Dowd trying to score a few easy points off the hide of David Brinkley? "Oh, get off it!" Zzzap. David Remnick of the *New Yorker*, slyly, engagingly attempting to insert a pedestal between Howard Stern and the dirt, so as to elevate him into a figure of cultural significance? Not so fast, pal. Barbra Streisand, peddling her *Weltanschauung* at Harvard? Puh-leeze. And don't get him started on Joyce Maynard.

MONDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK
by Jonathan Yardley
Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, $24.95

Whether this exigence is the result of Yardley's flinty Wasp temperament, or of his natural instinct to ascend the pulpit or wield the ferrule (he is descended from a long line of preachers and teachers), or simply of crankiness born of having to write these columns on Sunday, while the rest of us are scratching our terry-robed behinds and mixing Bloody Marys—who can say? But these dissatisfactions have provided grand entertainment and wisdom over the years. Many an otherwise joyless Monday a.m. have been rendered more tolerable by his well-reasoned, witty fulminations over the continuing, appalling decline of—just about everything.

I remember the morning I found this delicious lead staring up at me from the breakfast table, and was delighted to find it again here:

> Among the institutions upon which Washington prides itself, surely special honor must be accorded the National Prayer Breakfast. Held but once a year—evidently on the implicit understanding that once a year is quite sufficient—this august occasion assembles under one roof the most extensive collection of duplicity, of human hypocrisy, that has ever been gathered together in Washington, with the possible exception of when Richard Nixon prayed alone.

You could clone the whole of Yardley's sensibility from this one strand of DNA. It bears all the distinctive markers: his continuing dudgeon over Nixon, whom he seems to loathe even more in death than he did in life; Chestertonian irony; Mencken's lingo. (Yardley, like Mencken, lived in Baltimore for many years, and picked up much of the Master's 19th-century idiom.) Nixon never failed to raise his temperature past the boiling point. While the rest of us—even those who had hated and despised him and worked to impeach him—were blubbering over his bier, and a National Day of Mourning was declared in the general interests of reconciliation, Yardley was holed up, smoke and fire pouring out of every orifice, banging out a column titled, "National Day of What?" Reconciliation? He would have none of it. "It won't wash, at least not in *this* Maytag."

Yardley's politics are elusive, but with the aid of modern satellite navigation systems, can be tracked. You never quite know whom he'll be flaying alive on any given Monday, which makes picking up the *Post* that day all the more exhilarating. In his introduction, he tells us that he was madly for Adlai back in the '50s, and that he worked hard on behalf of the civil rights movement in the South, where he began his distinguished newspaper career. He was pro-Great Society

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CHRISTOPHER BUCKLEY's *new novel,* Little Green Men, *will be published by Random House in April. It will not be reviewed in the* Post *by Jonathan Yardley.*

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and anti-Vietnam. In so many words, a card-carrying liberal. (How satisfying to type those words...)

His Damascus moment came in, of all places, Harvard Yard. He happened to be there in the late '60s on a Nieman Fellowship when the place was trashed—by many of the people who are now running the country. "This, with all its repercussions, eventually became the shaping event in my adult life," he writes. "I was appalled by the wholesale repudiation of authority and tradition not merely by the pampered youth of the middle class but by the adults—professors, university administrators, journalists, intellectuals, politicians—who followed in their train." A new definition of a conservative: a liberal who watched America get mugged at Harvard.

You can see the crosshairs of this animus on almost every page here, in his excoriation of the tenured, Jew-baiting Professor Lionel Jeffries of City College in New York, in his contempt for political correctness as practiced in the universities or at the Smithsonian, and in his detestation of the current literary vogue for what he calls "exhibitionistic narcissism," as practiced by, among others, author Kathryn Harrison (*The Kiss*), a trend that he traces to the fiction of Joyce and the psychology of Uncle Sigmund.

Politically, his disdain is wide enough to embrace both Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. I demur from his criticism of the former, which I find wrong-headed and attitudinal, but I heartily join in his contumely for the present administration. The ferocity of his anger for the present occupants of the White House is unsurpassed by that of anyone I know in the vast right-wing conspiracy. I must, too, object to his condescension to George Bush, whom he repeatedly belittles as a feckless, patrician ninny. (Here let me declare my own allegiance: I worked for Bush; I like and admire the guy.) Yardley goes after him for the infamous supermarket bar-code scanner incident, over which vast hay was made of the fact that the President was unfamiliar with the device. "He's so out of touch with the daily lives of his constituents, he doesn't even know how they go about buying the food they put on their tables." This particular bit of dudgeon seems to me disproportionate. Was that other patrician president of the 20th century, Franklin Roosevelt, familiar with the supermarket cash registers in his time? When it came to technology, Bush had his priorities right. I submit that history is better off for his having known more about what kind of missile to use on Baghdad than about the Barcode Thing.

But this cavil aside, Yardley's scorn is as smart as the bombs we let fly into Iraq whenever impeachment worries threaten to overwhelm. He has laser sighting, and in the main his targets deserve what they get. What really gets Yardley's endocrine system pumping is the culture of celebrity and self-absorption. In a town where people stampede over their grandmothers—Colson, thou shouldst be living at this hour!—to get to the nearest TV studio in order to share their views on... anything at all, it is refreshing to discover that there lurks among us one dissenter from the Me-Me-Me Culture.

> It being my deep conviction that almost anything—lawn-mowing, house-painting, septic-tank-draining—is a better way to spend Sunday morning than listening to big-foot Washington journalists mouth off at each other, I have never seen more than snippets of *This Week*, and those involuntarily. But even on limited evidence it is abundantly plain that it, and all the other dreadful programs like it, has far less to do with the serious discussion of public issues than with the project of egos and, if they can be called that, 'personalities.'

These are lovely sentiments, too rarely uttered in Our Town, for the simple reason that everyone wants to be invited to go on these shows. Who among the chattering classes, has dared, say, to utter the rogue opinion that Larry King ought to be made to write a 100-word essay apologizing for enabling the presidential candidacy of Ross Perot? (Make that a 1000-word essay.) Yardley does not aspire to rub shoulders with such savant luminaries as Mort Zuckerman on *The McLaughlin Group*; he does not crave the good opinion of Maureen Dowd. (Indeed, he calls her the *Times*' "Vampira in residence.") How liberating it must be. I must try it sometime...

His greatest contempt—we'll get to the things he actually professes to like in a moment—is reserved for anything with the word "self" in front of it, as in "the self-indulgence and self-promotion that have become the distinguishing characteristics of American journalism in these *fin de siècle* years." If you guessed that he was talking about Joyce Maynard, go to the head of the class. On the subject of Barbra Streisand's big, big speech at Harvard (scene of the Ur-crime), he is at his most banal-expulsive:

> She can feel any old thing she wants to feel and she can even pretend that her feelings are thoughts, but none of this entitles her to be taken seriously as anything except an entertainer, and not very seriously as that. Were her

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self-regard just a tiny bit smaller than it is, she would realize that her performance at Harvard was just that: a star turn. Were her ego really under control, she'd understand that Harvard was using her every bit as much as she was using Harvard, that each, in permitting its gaudy light to be shed upon the other, was merely engaging in an act of reflective self-regard. This being her stock in trade, it must have seemed like just another day at the office.

Paragraphs like that keep one mumbling to the missus through a mouthful of Corn Toasties: *Hebhun, yagoddareddis!* [Trans: "Hey, honey, you've got to read this!"] This particular one appeared in February of 1995, and you know, it holds up pretty well, not bad at all for deadline newspaper stuff.

I said I'd try to mention things that Yardley likes, rather than deplores, but I seem to be running out of space. There are some lovely pieces on baseball and his beloved Baltimore Orioles, though since the publication of this book, he appears to have fallen out of love there, repelled finally by what big-money and TV have wrought on his once-treasured pastime. The section entitled "Ave Atque Vale" contains some genuinely lovely and moving tributes to dead friends and acquaintances, among them Walker Percy and Frederick Exley, about whom Yardley has written a superb biography. In the pages of this section we get glimpses of the warm heart that beats beneath the chain mail. Or whatever, as Bob Dole would say. Perhaps that same affection—for country, culture, old-fashioned standards of honor, honesty, and decency—is implicit in all his writing: Only someone who cares this deeply for the pageant could be moved to such gorgeous indignation by its continuing failures.

The Hidden Wound

The story of a black lawyer who tried and failed to ignore his race

By David J. Garrow

PAUL BARRETT'S POWERFUL AND POIGNANT book about the life and legal career of his one-time Harvard Law School roommate has lessons aplenty for anyone interested in affirmative action, employment litigation, or judicial racism.

Lawrence Mungin made it from a single-parent household in a Queens, New York, public housing project to Harvard College and then Harvard Law School before finally having to acknowledge the inescapability of race after joining the all-white Washington office of a Chicago-based law firm.

THE GOOD BLACK: A Story of Race in America
by Paul M. Barrett
Dutton, $23.95

Mungin's reluctant acceptance of his own racial identity is the unifying theme of Barrett's sensitive but not uncritical portrait. But lurking just behind that theme is the fact that Mungin's decision to escape as completely as possible from the world in which he grew up left him a fundamentally isolated and lonely person. Barrett recognizes the "rootlessness" that characterized Mungin's early adult life, but Mungin's reserved nature, and Barrett's obvious respect for his friend, seems to have kept Barrett from asking many potentially intrusive questions.

Barrett is explicitly willing to question the wisdom of Mungin's decision to move to Katten Muchin & Zavis in 1992 after several unremarkable years of early law practice at the two well-known firms of Weil, Gotshal & Manges and Powell, Goldstein, Frazer & Murphy. Barrett suggests that notwithstanding all the energy and drive Mungin had demonstrated earlier in life (including four years of very successful Navy service), by the time Mungin graduated from law school he was "coasting" professionally as well as personally drifting. Barrett believes that an attentive and savvy

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young lawyer should have recognized just how potentially troubled the Washington office of Katten Muchin was before taking a job there, but even in retrospect Mungin resolutely disagrees.

The centerpiece of *The Good Black* is Larry Mungin's experience at Katten Muchin. Barrett's narrative implicitly emphasizes two distinct but not inconsistent themes: (1) many if not most large law firms often behave thoughtlessly and callously toward young lawyers, and (2) the ways in which Mungin was sometimes ignored and at other times demeaned at Katten Muchin can but need not necessarily be viewed or explained through a racial prism.

Barrett underscores both how Mungin's unhappy experience at Katten Muchin did not feature any "racist insults or overtly hostile acts" and the ways in which other lawyers—white lawyers—not directly acquainted with Larry Mungin automatically questioned his professional competence once he filed suit against Katten Muchin in 1994. In fact, no one with whom Mungin had worked, either at Katten Muchin or at his previous firms, appears to have ever doubted his professional abilities. Yet one former Katten Muchin partner who had never met Mungin told Barrett just what the problem was: "Anyone who spends any time in the profession would know that there are lots of minorities, African-Americans especially, who are running around with Harvard and Yale degrees who are not qualified in any sense. They have been solicited and tutored and polished up and sent out to the profession and they're not up to grade, for whatever reason."

Barrett observes that "[t]his is not an unusual opinion among white lawyers at Katten Muchin and other elite firms, merely one that is rarely articulated," especially to journalists. That same usually unspoken attitude can also be seen in many other forums—law school faculty hiring decisions, for example—but Barrett accurately notes that the erroneous assumption that a black man such as Mungin "was a Harvard affirmative action phony" was nothing more than "an example of raw stereotyping."

Mungin's performance as the first witness before a D.C. federal district court trial jury in March, 1996 was highly compelling. True, seven of the eight jurors were black, and Mungin's lead counsel, Abbey Hairston, consistently outperformed her opposite number, but both the lawyers and Barrett—the trial's only consistent spectator—were surprised when the jury deliberated for hardly two hours before returning with a remarkable verdict in Mungin's favor: $1 million dollars in compensatory damages and an additional $1.5 million dollars in punitive damages.

One of Barrett's most striking observations concerns how the case "transformed Mungin" from someone who previously had done his utmost to minimize and ignore racial or possibly racial slights into someone who for the first time in his life was comfortable expressing racial anger. "When this law firm wronged him, in his eyes," Barrett told an NBC "Today Show" interviewer this January, "the fury of thirty-five years came pouring out, not just the reaction to what had happened over a couple of years in a law firm." Mungin himself readily credited Barrett, more than his own willingness to go to court, with bringing about the change: "Paul forced me to take the blinders off, to acknowledge race is an issue," he told the *National Law Journal.*

Mungin admitted in a National Public Radio interview that "my awakening came...rather late in the game," but Barrett does a superb job of detailing how the terminal illness and eventual death of Mungin's long-absent father, with whom he previously had never had any meaningful contact, reconnected Mungin to his familial and racial roots in an unprecedented way. Mungin's father had lived most of his life in the Sea Islands of South Carolina, and for his son the realization that his father was widely respected in his native haunts where the Mungin family had multi-generation roots came as a life-changing corrective to his prior conclusion that his father was a no 'count loser.

Both in Barrett's book and in Mungin's life, that reconnection with his father and his extended family looms far larger than the reversal of his trial court victory by a three-judge panel of the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals in July, 1997. The law firm representing Mungin had gone through tremendous turmoil in the months and weeks just before the Circuit panel heard argument on Katten Muchin's appeal, but it was the composition of the three-judge panel—and particularly the presence of Circuit Judge A. Raymond Randolph, not the quality of counsel's advocacy—that predetermined the outcome.

At oral argument, Judge Randolph asked Katten Muchin's visibly surprised lawyer how well Mungin had done as a student at Harvard Law School—a subject on which the case record was understandably silent—and then followed up by gratuitously asking Mungin's counsel whether Mungin had been fired from either of his previous law firm jobs. Barrett asks with considerable understatement whether Randolph had "come to the oral argument assuming that the plaintiff was unqualified, a black lawyer carried along

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by affirmative action," and Barrett expresses no surprise at the eventual outcome, a two-to-one total reversal of Mungin's jury verdict in which Judge Stephen Williams joined with Randolph to out-vote black D.C. Circuit Chief Judge Harry Edwards.

Barrett observes that that particular judicial panel "probably would have reached the same result if Thurgood Marshall in his NAACP prime had made Mungin's case." To Mungin himself, the appellate majority's conclusion that the trial evidence "was insufficient for a reasonable jury to have reached the challenged verdict" represented "judicial nullification." Different from but similar to the widely-debated concept of "jury nullification" whereby racially-sympathetic jurors refuse to convict a same-race defendant, Mungin defined "judicial nullification" as "the reaction of white appellate judges to the verdict of a predominantly black jury that has found in favor of a black party."

After the trial, the presiding judge had affirmed that "the evidence supports a finding of racial discrimination." Barrett's verdict is much the same: "it is more likely than not—the legal standard in civil cases—that Mungin's race played an important part in the particularly callous way he was handled." But Barrett's conclusion that the D.C. Circuit majority was wrong and "should have left the jury's discrimination verdict undisturbed" looms less large than his far more powerful but largely implicit judgment that the most important result of *Mungin v. Katten Muchin & Zavis* was not the judgment that the plaintiff lost but the identity he unexpectedly found. *The Good Black* leaves a reader—or at least this reader—sharing Barrett's regret that Mungin's $2.5 million dollar windfall disappeared. But the more subtle message of this memorable book is that Larry Mungin, like thousands before him, discovered an inner self he previously hadn't known once he embraced a struggle that he finally realized he could not avoid.

The Glamour Trap

Are "entertainment values" blinding us to what really matters?

By Joshua Wolf Shenk

A FEW MONTHS AGO, I ATTENDED WITH A friend a 150th anniversary reading of the Communist Manifesto. This was my first time inside the Cooper Union, a stately old building in lower Manhattan that was, in February 1860, the site of a speech by Abraham Lincoln that set the Eastern intelligentsia buzzing and played a major role in his subsequent nomination. "Let us have faith," Lincoln concluded, "that right makes might. And in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it."

LIFE THE MOVIE: How Entertainment Conquered Reality
By Neal Gabler
Knopf, $25

On this night in 1998, a large crowd had assembled in that spirit. But it was a gray-haired crowd. I wondered why. Did it reflect ideological shifts over generations, or the fact that igniting a revolution or even joining a movement—whatever its ideas—is simply out of step with the values of people my age?

For my part, I attended the reading not as a participant, but as an audience member. I had come because the Manifesto reading featured the playwrights Wallace Shawn and Tony Kushner. I had come in search of provocative ideas. But also for entertainment.

In *Life the Movie*, Neal Gabler argues that entertainment has "conquered reality." He insists his book contains no "high dudgeon." But his idea does have obvious moral implications, which is why it deserves to be taken seriously. My dictionary defines entertainment as "that which holds the attention by amusing or diverting." If we are "diverting" ourselves, it raises the question of what from? If our relationships—even our internal identity—is constructed around entertainment, then what happens to the more sober demands of reality?

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Gabler's conceit is that entertainment is no longer just something we like or participate in, or a technique used to beguile us. It is who we are. We don't just spend our time being entertained. We live in what he calls a "life movie"—with Martha Stewart supplying the sets, Ralph Lauren the costumes, and Tina Brown the scripts. Our audience may be our family and friends—but it is also increasingly an audience of millions, through shows like Jerry Springer's or "America's Funniest Videos." Life, Gabler argues, has become "the biggest, most entertaining, most realistic movie of all, one that play[s] twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, and feature[s] a cast of billions."

Gabler's story begins in the early 19th century, the point at which an American popular culture emerged that was distinct from its European counterpart. "Nostalgists may like to think of America before the movies and television as the land of Abraham Lincoln, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederic Church and Emily Dickinson," he writes. But that's like thinking of modern America as the land of Martin Luther King Jr., John Updike, Richard Diebenkorn, and Robert Lowell. "It is true, but only so far as it goes."

In fact, as serious artists noticed with horror, junk was everywhere in this era. "I should have no chance of success while public taste is occupied with their trash," Nathaniel Hawthorne complained of the success of novelists like the "lachrymose" Susan Warner and the "salacious" George Lippard, "and I should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed."

If the ultimate triumph of popular culture ever was in doubt—and Gabler believes it wasn't, given that the superior numbers of the "lowborn" and the entrance of poor women into the cultural marketplace—a new medium of entertainment made the calculus all the more clear. "It has come then," the poet Vachel Lindsay wrote in 1922, "this new weapon of men, and the face of the whole earth changes."

What had arrived, first in vaudeville houses, then moving to the backroom of penny arcades, then to "nickelodeon theaters" named for the cost of admission, was the movies. The working classes made up nearly three-quarters of film audiences in the early days; the fact that moviegoers still munch popcorn and slurp drinks in theaters today is a reminder of those origins. In the early days, films were bawdy and provocative, ridiculing the elites and alarming the middle classes. A Detroit News headline from 1916 read, "LOW GRADE PERSONS ONLY LIKE CHARLIE CHAPLIN AND MARY PICKFORD, PASTOR SAYS."

This headline shows that popular entertainment, as a locus of discontent, once threatened the better-off. It also hints at how the movies would slowly suffocate that function, by shifting focus from the stories being told to the actors on the screen. We can still be ennobled by the work of people who happen to be famous. But the distinction between appreciation and star-gazing seems to get fuzzier each year.

Walter Winchell, the subject of Gabler's previous book, played a major role in this transition. With a popular radio show and newspaper column, Winchell dished a delicious blend of news, opinion, and gossip. Making careers and lobbing verbal grenades, he helped create the modern celebro-journalistic complex. (It is an indication of *Life The Movie*'s thinness that Winchell is barely mentioned.) In a recent interview, Gabler explained that Winchell "understood that gossip, far beyond its basic attraction as journalistic voyeurism, was a weapon of empowerment for the reader and listener. Invading the lives of the famous and revealing their secrets brought them to heel. It humanized them, and in humanizing them demonstrated that they were no better than we and in many cases worse."

Still, it's quite a stretch to say that the paparazzi and gossip hounds "empower" the rest of us. Whether we're gazing on an airbrushed photo, an unflattering one, or their verbal equivalents, our attention is still focused outward. It may be that the object of that attention deserves it—has something interesting to say, for example. More likely, they are interesting only because they're famous—and their fame is burnished and maintained by continued interest. Daniel Boorstin's seminal 1962 book *The Image* is still the best reference on this tautology. It was Boorstin who defined a celebrity as someone "well known for his well-knownness" (a phrase now included in the Oxford English Dictionary). Boorstin also wrote that the celebrity "is made by all of us who willingly read about him, who like to see him on television, who buy recordings of his voice, and talk about him to our friends. His relation to morality and even to reality is highly ambiguous."

Celebrities, in other words, are constructions of our imagination, creatures of fantasy. To the extent that they occupy our attention, we unhinge ourselves from reality. Of course, that's part of the point of entertainment, to provide an escape from lives of quiet desperation. Gabler uses the example of a successful judge who was raised in poverty by a brutal father. How did he survive? "I told myself stories," he answered. Obviously, the use of "positive illusions" can be valuable. Equally obvious is that this can go too far, as in Freud's warning that "whoever, in desperate defiance, sets out upon this path to happiness will, as

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a rule, attain nothing. Reality is too strong for him. He becomes a madman."

But the movies are not mere escapism. As Gabler puts it, they "provide a model of narrative coherence in a world of seeming anarchy." This function can also be served by religion or ideology. But the "onslaught of modern life" has vanquished the latter and mightily chipped away at the former. So we're left with the big screen, the tube, and the media swirl of celebrities that surround them. And whereas popular culture once incited, provoked, aroused—now it mostly lulls.

To me, this is the important point of Gabler's book. But he never really articulates the point, let alone explores its significance. Part of the problem is that he races through this history—and a ream of familiar examples of how celebrity is mistaken for substance—to get to his real point: that the confusion between fiction and reality has filtered down to the masses. Byron and Whitman and Hemingway all cultivated their celebrity to sell their literature; Ronald Reagan set the standard in acting as politics. Now, Gabler believes, these values have been accepted by everyone. We all see ourselves as canvasses for display.

His two best examples are the successes of Ralph Lauren and Martha Stewart. The former, born to a middle-class family with the surname Lipschitz, built a brand that extends from clothing to housepaint, all with the idea that the value of his products was the images they offered. "As Lauren saw it," Gabler writes, "what the movies had always done on-screen, which was to provide transport into their world, he could now do in life." Martha Stewart, meanwhile, showed people how to use such objects to construct a fantasy life. The fact that she has built a $200 million empire of books, magazines, TV shows and products is evidence, in Gabler's view, that "women wanted to make their homes a set for their own life movies."

Gabler may well be right. But if he's trying to prove that people buy Martha Stewart's products because they think of themselves of as actors, you might think he would ask people who buy Martha Stewart's products. My own informal polling on this question—undertaken precisely because my suspicions are like Gabler's—has proven quite inconclusive. Cooks I know like Martha Stewart's recipes. Lovers of greenery like her ideas for making art out of leaves and flowers. Perhaps unconsciously they are infected with the aesthetic of entertainment—or a desire to make their lives as attractive as Martha's. But maybe they just like good food and nice homes.

There is a serious, complicated question here about whether modern society has broken from old patterns and whether the spell of entertainment is the principal cause. Perhaps the proliferation of stores like Polo, The Gap, and Banana Republic simply reflect the basic human desire to present ourselves well to others. Perhaps they do represent something new, but the reason is that most Americans don't need the functional clothing that farm and factory workers did—and most have some money to spend on the luxuries of fashion. Gabler doesn't resolve these conflicting possibilities. He doesn't even try.

It's unfortunate that a book on such a vitally important topic—whether we are increasingly choosing superficiality over substance—is itself so superficial. Lincoln's plea that we, "to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it" seems quaint these days. So does the warning early this century from Moving Picture World that "the comic, the tragic, the fantastic, the mystic scenes so swiftly enacted in photographic pantomime are not real but feigned." Yet both these messages are more urgent than ever.

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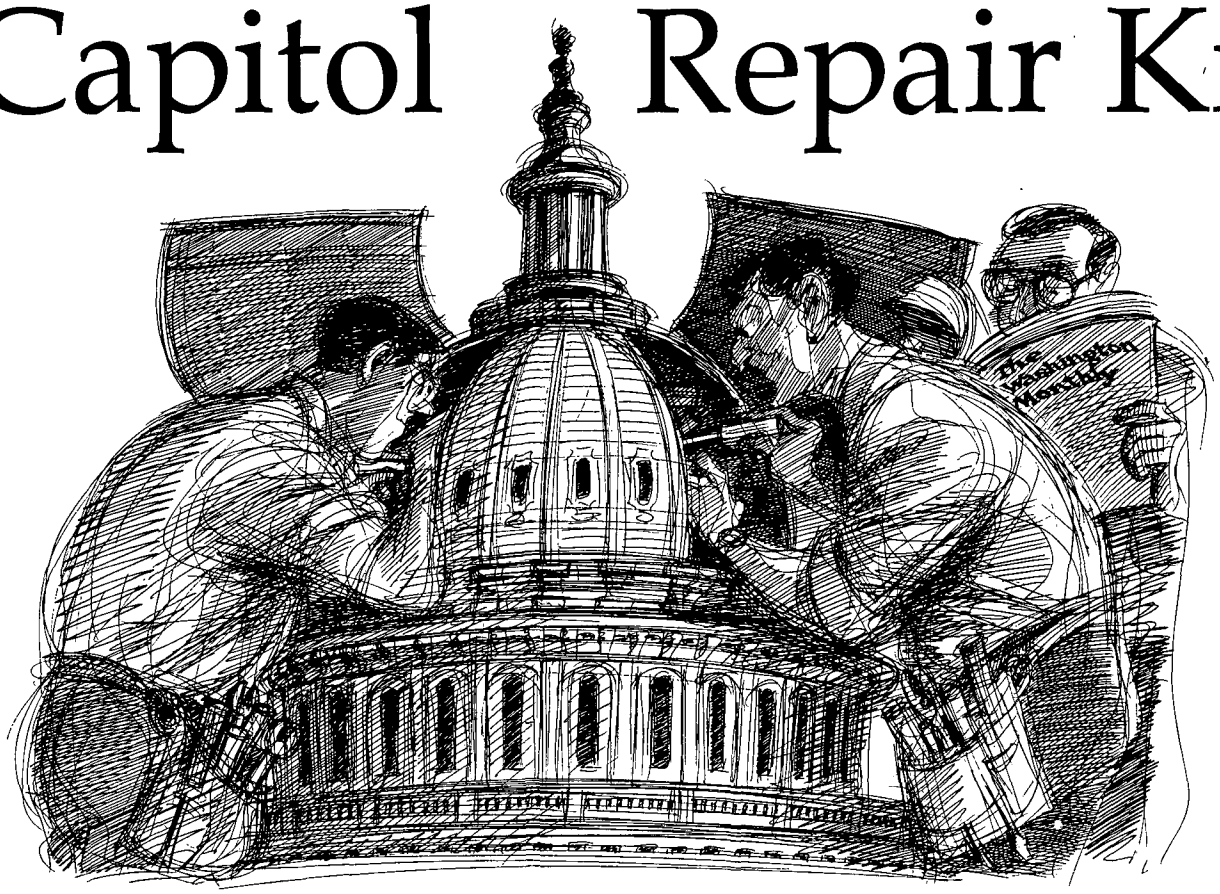

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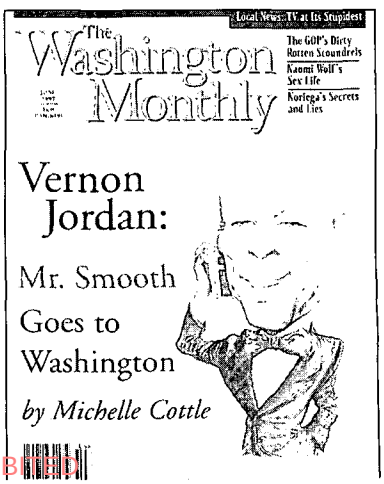

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Political Booknotes

Tilted Scales

by Colman McCarthy

IN MY CONVERSATIONS WITH juveniles imprisoned at the Oak Hill Youth Center, in Laurel, Md., the names of D.C. Superior Court judges frequently come up. Almost always, inmates vent at the robed men and women who impose sentences on the Oak Hill population that is nearly all African American, poor, and ill-educated.

NO EQUAL JUSTICE:
Race and Class in the American Criminal Justice System
by David Cole
The New Press, $25

Anyone who reads David Cole's *No Equal Justice* will understand why these teenagers have less than cheery opinions about their judges. To them, the beleaguered men and women of the bench symbolize a system that is rigged against them. "The criminal justice system's exploitation of inequality," writes Cole, "creates a discrepancy between the formal rules, under which criminal responsibility is a function of individual culpability and all are equal before the law, and actual practice, in which who you know, how much money you have, and the color of your skin all play an important role in criminal justice outcomes."

Cole, a professor at Georgetown University Law Center (disclosure: I am on the adjunct faculty at Georgetown, but I do not know the author) and an attorney with the Center for Constitutional Rights, lays out the facts of racial and economic inequality. There is little new material here, but the statistics are harrowing just the same: For every black college graduate, 100 are arrested. African Americans comprise more than half the prison population. And as many as 80 percent of criminal defendants are too poor to hire a lawyer.

Cole writes as an advocate for reform, which places him in the company of those mostly anonymous citizens working to protect the powerless from the powerful by creating one standard, not two, in criminal law. Will change come about anytime soon? Cole is too aware, too experienced, and too chastened to conclude anything but the obvious: Reform will be "extremely difficult." First, he says, we must recognize that under our current judicial system every person is *not* equal before the law. Then, Cole continues, "we must identify and develop community-based responses to crime, both at the preventive and punitive stages."

It has the ring of reasonableness, except when it comes to the "we" part. Who is "we"? Cole presumably means the public. But there is scarcely a widespread movement for judicial reform in this country, and this book falls short as a call to arms. Cole would have had better success if he had given as much space to proposing solutions as he does to laying out problems. He devotes only one chapter to possible remedies, and even then he excuses himself from doing the heavy lifting: "A full-scale reform strategy would be another book in itself," he writes.

What *No Equal Justice* is lacking is a reporter's nerve, a hands-on portrait of the race and class inequality as found in the lives of citizens. Cole is a law professor, at ease with gathering information from studies and case law, and passing it on in cornucopian abundance. But he does not appear to have conducted interviews with imprisoned young blacks or their families. He also did not tap the public interest lawyers, social workers, teachers or judges laboring to reduce race and class disparities. For every problem that Cole analyzes—and he does so credibly and knowledgeably—one or more national groups, from victim assistance programs to public defender agencies, have dug in to battle for the kind of institutional reform called for in *No Equal Justice*. Why not tell their stories, particularly those that would have added heft to Cole's pleas and nudged them beyond "general principles"?

COLMAN MCCARTHY *directs the Center for Teaching Peace in Washington, D.C.*

GE's Greed

by Morton Mintz

THIS BOOK MAKES A VALUABLE contribution to our understanding of corporate America. Superbly researched and written, it could drive some readers to take a fresh look at stocks. I mean the old-fashioned kind, the kind consisting of a heavy timber frame with holes for confining the ankles and sometimes the wrists. Of whom? First, the czar of the world's most profitable corporation, the most successful, most admired big-business executive in America, a frequent White House guest of Ronald Reagan, a golfing partner of Bill Clinton, the father of corporate downsizing. Next in line, his hatchet-men, followed by bought legislators and scientists. Finally, idolaters—journalists, authors, business-school professors. To believe them, John F. Welch's General Electric brings only good things to life. Thomas F. O'Boyle persuades you that GE—Jack Welch's GE—brings bad things to life. In abundance.

Yet *At Any Cost* is no populist tract. The author, a longtime *Wall Street Journal* correspondent and now an assistant managing editor at the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, draws stark contrasts between the many large corporations that prosper mightily with foresighted, rational and humane policies, and GE as it's been run for 18 years by a tyrannical, sometimes impetuous, surprisingly blunder-prone, and—above all—profit-obsessed chairman and CEO.

"I have done everything in my power to write a fair and balanced account of General Electric," O'Boyle writes. He succeeds at every turn, partly by providing insightful, textured context—historical, scientific, engineering, competitive, political, legal,

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ethical, personal. He enables readers to see things whole. Yes, the Justice Department obtained price-fixing indictments against GE's synthetic diamond business and the DeBeers cartel (it makes a fascinating chapter even if Justice lost in the end). Remember, though, that between 1940 and 1948, when Welch was a boy, the government had sued GE for antitrust violations 13 times. O'Boyle shows how Welch's obsession with profit, an ideology, really, translates into unrelenting, pitiless pressure on his executives to better last year's numbers every year. They must do this with "enthusiasm and gusto," real or feigned, because loyalty in Welch's GE runs only upward. Their heads are never far from the chopping block. They sometimes do terrible things. Could it be otherwise?

AT ANY COST:
Jack Welch, General Electric, and the Pursuit of Profit
by Thomas F. O'Boyle
Knopf, $29.95

GE had 285,000 U.S. workers when Welch took over in 1981; it had 120,000 fewer by 1997. If his profit obsession means repeated wholesale downsizings, if these decimate communities (Schenectady, N.Y., lost 22,000 jobs; Louisville, Ky., 13,000; Evandale, Ohio, 12,000; Pittsfield, Mass., 8,000), if they wreck families, if they lead several workers to kill themselves (as happened in Erie, Pa., after downsizings eliminated 6,000 jobs), that's not "Chainsaw Jack"'s problem.

Contrasts: Motorola fires no employee with 10 years' service "without the explicit concurrence of the Chairman of the Board." Lucent Technologies was to cut 23,000 jobs when AT&T spun it off. Welch's counterpart, Henry Schacht, gave every worker 100 shares of Lucent stock at a discounted price. "He met with employees to listen to their concerns and address them," O'Boyle writes. "And the 19,000 jobs that were ultimately eliminated have all been regained." No one calls Schacht "Chainsaw."

If the profit obsession means lying to regulators about intentionally polluting the Hudson River with 1 million pounds of birth-deforming PCBs over a 30-year period, don't believe it: Jack says PCBs pose no danger to human health.

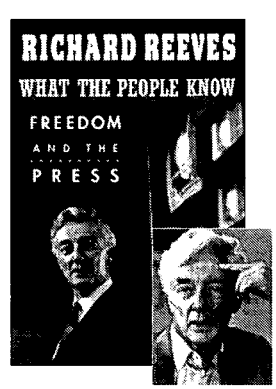
In 1992, the year before it sold its arms business, GE became the first major defense contractor to be indicted for defrauding the government. GE "pleaded guilty to four felonies, including money laundering and violations of the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act," O'Boyle writes. "It was the third criminal conviction on defense fraud charges since 1985, along with 13 civil settlements, giving GE the dubious distinction of [being the] leading corporate criminal among the Pentagon's 100 largest defense contractors." Gives you a comfy feeling about GE owning NBC, right?

GE's Kidder, Peabody illegally forced out 17 investment bankers because of age. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission responded with the biggest age-discrimination lawsuit ever brought by the federal government against a Wall Street brokerage. "Let's not kid ourselves," Welch told *The Wall Street Journal* "[T]his is a kick in the teeth for those guys." "[T]hose guys"? One of "those guys", O'Boyle reminds us, was "Welch's close associate Mike Carpenter, who ran Kidder, Peabody and reported directly to him."

Welch got a comeuppance in July 1992. Rep. John Dingell, who had been investigating defense fraud for years, insisted Welch testify before his House investigations subcommittee. Welch came, kicking and screaming, big-time lawyers fronting for him. But Dingell compelled him "to acknowledge, for the first time and in a very public forum," that GE, as a Pentagon contractor, had broken the law, "and to, in effect, take responsibility for what GE had done."

From its beginnings in 1889, GE's glory was research and development for the long term. Lord, how it paid off—for the country, not just GE! Its R&D, well funded, done by great, respected—and trusted—scientists and engineers,

RICHARD REEVES
WHAT THE PEOPLE KNOW
FREEDOM AND THE PRESS



"Richard Reeves is a respected veteran journalist who wants fellow journalists to concentrate on ferreting out the truth without fear or favor. That sounds like a mundane topic for a book. After all, what else would journalists be expected to do? But Reeves's *What the People Know* is anything but mundane because so many journalists either have no idea how to ferret out the truth, or seem to have forgotten that part of their job... [This book]—part personal reminiscence, part media critique... [is] worthwhile [reading] for anybody who cares about Reeves's illustrious career or the state of journalism."
—Steve Weinberg, CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR

"Reporting the news was once a fairly simple and, for Reeves, exciting and honorable task: get the story, get it right, report it. Today, however, journalism 'is in a crisis of change and redefinition'... [Reeves] gets the story and gets it right. Nice reporting."
—KIRKUS REVIEWS

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produced a cascade of enduring, diverse inventions, four being "the first moving picture with talking sound, the first jet engine, the first synthetic diamond—and the first Children's Silly Putty."

Welch called R&D "Blue Sky" research. He cut it by nearly 20 percent in the 1990s. The way to go, he'd decided, was financial services, including snapping up distressed properties taken by the government from failed S&Ls. Contrast: Motorola first outpaced GE's R&D spending in 1993—and has added 43,000 *manufacturing* jobs since 1992. Siemens employs more than three times as many scientists and engineers as GE and is big on long-term R&D, as are Hitachi and Toshiba. All show impressive results.

But the move to financial services sent shareholder value soaring. GE's shares increased 1,155 percent in value in the 15 years starting in 1982; and in mid-1997 GE became the first corporation to be valued at more than $200 billion. By last July it was valued at $300 billion. It has earned more in single quarters than in all four quarters of 1980. Welch's investments in Washington lobbyists, lawyers and politicians have paid off handsomely, too. In 1980, GE paid $330 million in federal taxes; in 1981 it had a net tax refund of $104 million.

Many horrors—pre- and post-Welch—occurred at the GE-run Knolls Atomic Power Laboratory at West Milton, N.Y. GE allowed nuclear reactors to operate without emergency core cooling systems. One day, state regulators asked Knolls, with reason, to release no radioactivity into the atmosphere; it released 600 curies—40 times as much as Three Mile Island would release in 1979.

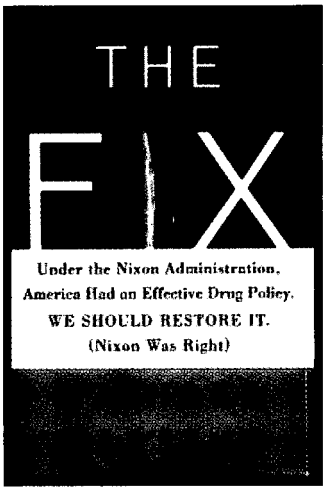
Knolls used radioactive fill for a parking lot. It illegally dumped radioactivity into the Mohawk River. It deposited 389 tons of radioactive and toxic wastes in thousands of steel drums, buried the drums at dozens of sites near the lab, and kept no records of what it had buried and where. It let plutonium-contaminated water seep into an office building and into the drainage system migrating toward the Mohawk. The Navy urged demolition of the building. It was brushed off.

Whistleblowers finally got the facts out. GE executives responded just as they did in numerous other horrifying episodes at GE sites elsewhere. Mostly in secrecy, they fumed, lied, and covered up.

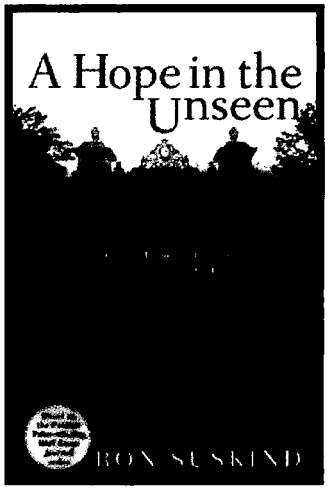
A bumper crop of CEOs emulates Welch's bare-knucklism. O'Boyle argues that companies that make layoffs the "first resort" jettison not only people, but also "the old-fashioned business values that made this the American century—loyalty, trust, respect, teamwork, hard work, compassion." He has a point. But don't forget, say, the men in the good-old-days steel mills who worked 12-hour shifts six days a week and 24-hour shifts every second week.

O'Boyle asks, "Do companies have obligations beyond the bottom line?" His—and my—bottom-word answer: Yes.

MORTON MINTZ, *author of* At Any Cost: Corporate Greed, Women and the Dalkon Shield *(1985), is a former* Washington Post *reporter and a former chair of the Fund for Investigative Journalism.*



1998 Political Book Award



THE FIX:
Under the Nixon Administration, America had an Effective Drug Policy. We Should Restore It. (Nixon Was Right)
by Michael Massing

A HOPE IN THE UNSEEN
An American Odyssey from the Inner City to the Ivy League
by Ron Suskind

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Capital Follies

by Jon Meacham

PITY THE PLIGHT OF THE LATE millennial Washington satirist. What's left to parody when the most-read insider book of recent years can, with a narrative voice that mixes Joe Friday with Judith Krantz, spin uncontroverted tales of presidential phone sex and stained Gap dresses, hat pins and Kleenex, Linda Tripp and Lucianne Goldberg? Jonathan Swift would have envied the Starr Report—and the independent counsel's ghostwriters had it all under oath.

LITTLE GREEN MEN
by Christopher Buckley
Random House, $23.95

So it is high testament indeed to Christopher Buckley's extraordinary talent that he has once again produced a terrific Beltway novel, one that takes readers on a first-hand tour of the capital's little-known folkways, deftly skewering the pretensions of the pundit class and the Establishment's sense of entitlement. And did I mention the alien abductions?

The plot goes roughly like this: John Oliver Banion, a buttoned-down commentator in his late forties with tortoiseshell glasses, his own Sunday morning TV show and a wife named Bitsey, is at the top of the Washington food chain. Author of books like *Pig's Breakfast: The Failure of U.S. Foreign Policy from Cuba to Beirut*, *Colossi of Rhodes*, an "admiring" study of Rhodes scholars, and *Screwing the Poor*, a best-seller on welfare reform, Banion comfortably dashes off a newspaper column, gives pricey speeches and relies on his impoverished Georgetown research assistants.

When we first meet our hero, he is slapping around the president of the United States on the air. "'Mr. President,' Banion said, 'I want to ask you why, in light of your administration's below-par performance in a number of areas, you haven't fired at least two-thirds of your cabinet, but first ...' It was a trademark Banion opener: establish the guest's inadequacy, then move along to the even more pressing issue. The president maintained a glacial equanimity. For this he had gotten up early on Sunday and helicoptered all the way back to Washington. The press secretary would suffer ... The president smiled, suppressing his desire to pick up the water pitcher and smash it against the forehead of this supercilious twerp."

Buckley knows his territory, and the words he puts in the mouths and heads of powerful people have the ring of truth—which is, of course, the mark of a great satirist. Once a speechwriter for Vice President George Bush, Buckley has written two other dead-on Washington novels: *The White House Mess*, a perfect send-up of the classic capital memoir, and *Thank You For Smoking*, an excellent novel about the travails of a public relations flack for Big Tobacco. When Banion leaves the studio en route to a cave-dweller brunch, Bitsey calls him on his cell phone, worried that the president, who is supposed to come to dinner at the Banions' the next week, will cancel. "It gave him a thrum of pleasure that Bitsey was anxious," Buckley's narrator writes. "Dear thing—didn't she understand that presidents came and went?"

How to puncture Banion's perfect, buckraking world? Buckley chooses a secret government agency, Majestic 12, that was founded in "that golden Cold War summer of 1947." Its purpose: to stage UFO sightings and the crash at Roswell in order to "convince Stalin that UFOs existed and that the United States was in possession of their technology. That would keep Uncle Joe on his toes." But Buckley doesn't just know the mores of Georgetown and Cleveland Park: He also understands the bureaucratic imperatives that drive the agencies downtown. "Then," he notes, "as with so many other government programs, the original plan gave way to bigger things." The directors of Majestic 12 decided "that as long as they were at it, MJ-12 could serve another, even higher purpose: keeping the taxpaying U.S. citizenry alarmed about the possibility of invasion from outer space, and therefore happy to fund expansion of the military-aerospace complex. A country convinced that little green men were hovering over the rooftops was inclined to vote yea for big weapons and space programs." How? Run a black operation to tow pie-shaped discs behind camouflaged aircraft, leave scorch marks in the grass and traumatize pets. That soon grew boring: MJ-12 had to figure out a way to give folks a look at the aliens themselves. ("This was trickier," Buckley writes. "For one thing, it meant finding dwarfs with security clearances.") And so the era of alien abductions began, with agents drugging the odd farmer or farmer's wife, acting out an alien pantomime, and then turning them loose. Why farmer-types? "The idea was that alien abductees should be just credible enough to spread the word but not so respectable that their testimony would precipitate an urgent search for the truth. They would not, for instance, want to snatch someone as prominent as, say, the chairman of the Federal Reserve. That would, in all likelihood, lead to trouble."

"They" were right. The trouble started one Sunday morning when Nathan Scrubbs, an operative, has one too many pepper vodka Bloody Marys to chase away the blues. (His cover was working at the Social Security Administration: "The hours were long. It did not make for a dazzling social life. Hi. What do you do? I work for the Social Security Administration. Really? That's cool. Excuse me, I have to go repark the car.") Drunk, Scrubbs catches Banion's condescending TV act and orders up an unauthorized abduction. Banion, drugged and conned in a patch of woods at Burning Tree, becomes a true believer. Chaos follows: He loses his sponsor, his show, and his wife. Banion becomes the apostle of the UFO subculture and leads a Millennial March on the Mall. In Buckley's hands, the wacky journey is a pleasure to read. The fact that a man who has spent years pondering Washington can so easily evoke the world of alien obsession and UFO believers should give the capital some pause, I would think: Maybe the two aren't so different after all.

JON MEACHAM, *a contributing editor for* The Washington Monthly, *is a managing editor of* Newsweek.

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Tidbits & Outrages

IQ & Crime—The Missing Link 1

A St. Louis man dialing for a prostitute accidentally reached the police department instead. After arranging for a rendezvous with a police dispatcher and giving her his Master Card number, he was cited for a misdemeanor.

He forgot to say "Please"

In Farmingdale, N.Y., a would-be bank robber was foiled when his teller simply said "no" when ordered to empty her cash drawer.

OK, but can they do the Macarena?

American scientist, Dr. Hector Corona, has reported that dolphins pick up radio tunes from passing boats and sing along to Maria Carey and Bryan Adams.

Objective Journalism

A recent law journal article began:

"WASHINGTON — On a chill, gray morning, with the nearby Washington Monument penitently sheathed in a condom of repair scaffolding, our nation's second presidential impeachment trial commenced."

details...

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IQ & Crime—The Missing Link 2

George and Antonio Morgan were arrested and convicted of murder after answering a call from the police to their victim's missing pager.

It'll put the glow back into your face

In November, the Ukrainian tourist agency Liko-L began guided tours of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor because the government has reported the radiation levels are low and "not dangerous."

Joshua Barlow

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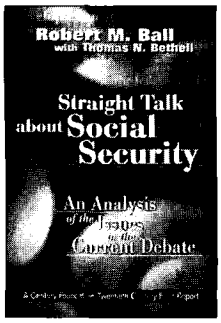

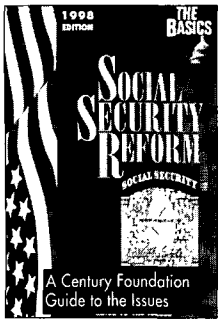

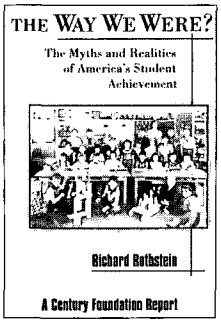

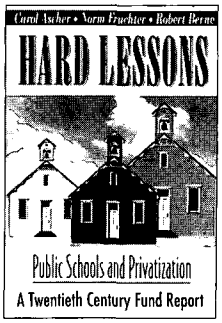

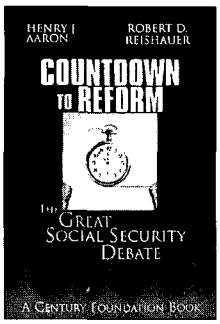

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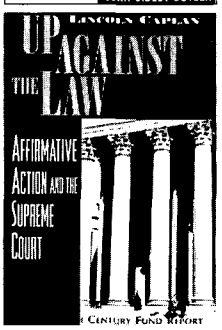

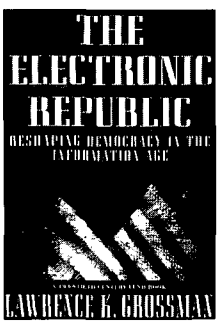

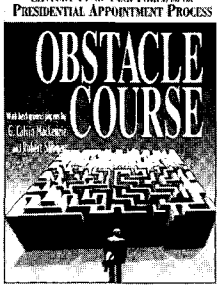

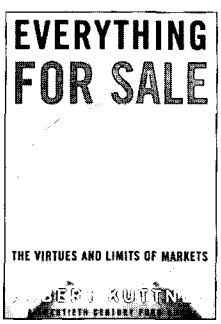

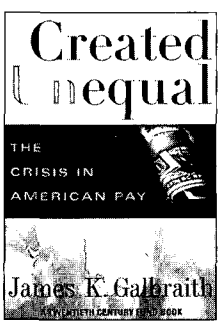

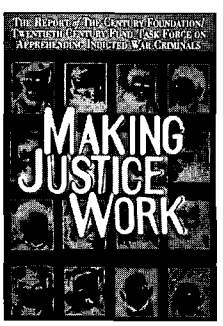

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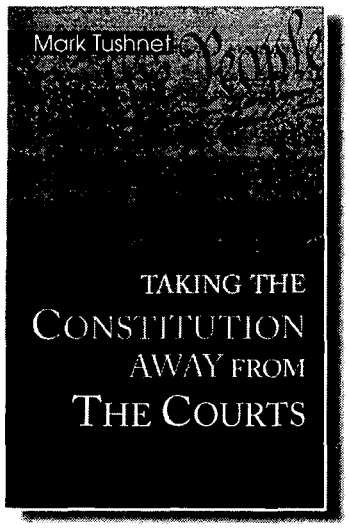

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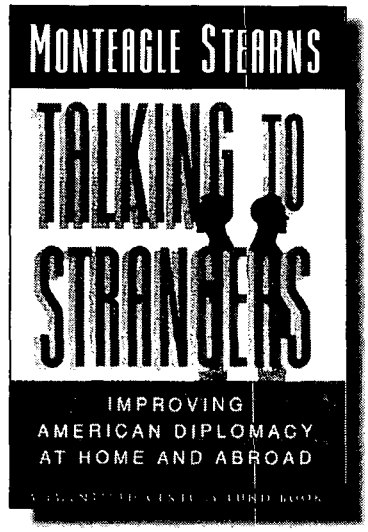

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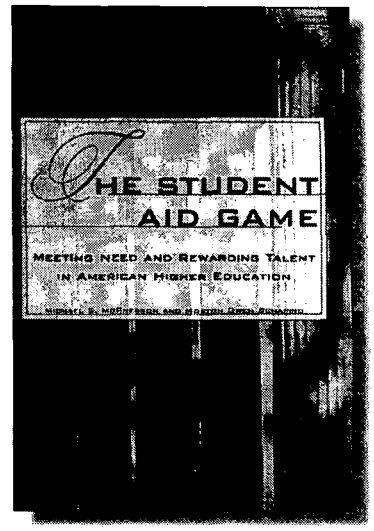

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